

**Web Movements and Organic Intellectuals:
Influence of digital technologies on political participation**

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

doctor philosophiae (Dr. phil.)

im Fach

Global and Area Studies

eingereicht am

05 / 07 / 2018

Disputation am

18 / 10 / 2018

an der Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät
der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

von Satish Thalla

Präsidentin der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Prof. Dr.-Ing. Dr. Sabine Kunst

Dekanin der Kultur-, Sozial- und Bildungswissenschaftlichen Fakultät
Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal

Gutachterin/Gutachter:

1. Prof. Dr. Vincent Houben
2. Prof. Dr. Alejandro Pelfini

Abstract / Zusammenfassung

Abstract

A new kind of social movements are not only introducing individuals from within the masses to new political and social topics, and raising their interest and activity in political education and participation, but also enabling their ability to learn, discuss, deliberate, share, and organize themselves for making the political institutions of the society to work for their interests. This hypothesis was formulated in order to aid the process of finding an answer to the research question: how are digital technologies helping in the development process of organic intellectuals? Based on the concepts presented by Manuel Castells and Antonio Gramsci, a qualitative analysis of the responses collected in four countries across four different continents using semi-structured interviews presented the evidence used to validate the above hypothesis.

The research also examines couple of main aspects of the online environment in relation to a global web movement. One is relating to the major criticisms of online political participation such as 'Digital Divide', 'Clicktivism', and 'Simplification', while the second is relating to the dilution of the concept of 'Sovereignty'. The gathered data allows this research to argue against the criticisms, and problematize the concept of national sovereignty. This research questions the general assumption that a global action in support of local issues is based on solidarity, and presents a different perspective focused on the right to demand action based on an identification of global citizenship.

Keywords: web movement, organic intellectual, digital technologies, political participation

Zusammenfassung

Eine neue Art von sozialen Bewegungen führt nicht nur Individuen aus der breiten Masse in neue politische und soziale Themen ein und stärkt ihre politische Partizipation, sondern befähigt sie, zu lernen, sich auszutauschen und zu organisieren, um sich so dafür einzusetzen, dass die politischen und gesellschaftlichen Institutionen im Sinne ihrer Interessen arbeiten. Diese Hypothesen sollen dabei helfen, eine Antwort auf folgende Forschungsfrage zu finden: Wie unterstützen digitale Technologien die Entwicklung von organischen Intellektuellen? Um die oben genannten Hypothesen zu validieren, wurde ausgehend von den von Manuel Castells und Antonio Gramsci vorgestellten Konzepten eine qualitative Analyse der Ergebnisse semi-strukturierter Interviews aus vier verschiedenen Ländern auf vier Kontinenten durchgeführt.

Die Forschungsarbeit untersucht zentrale Charakteristika der digitalen Umgebung globaler Web-Bewegungen. Zum einen bezieht sich dies auf gängige Kritikpunkte an politischer Online-Partizipation wie "Digital Divide",

"Clicktivism" und "Simplification", zum anderen auf die Verwässerung des Konzepts der Souveränität. Auf Grundlage der erhobenen Daten argumentiert die vorliegende Arbeit gegen diese Kritikpunkte und problematisiert das Konzept der nationalen Souveränität. Die Forschungsarbeit stellt die Annahme infrage, dass globale Unterstützung für lokale Angelegenheiten auf Solidarität basiert, und führt eine Perspektive ein, die das Recht auf Beteiligung als Ausdruck einer Identifikation als globaler Staatsbürger versteht.

Schlüsselwörter: Webbewegung, organischer Intellekt, digitale Technologien, politische Partizipation

Acknowledgements

Foremost thanks go to my Doktorvater Prof. Vincent Houben. He has been a very supportive, patient and understanding thesis supervisor. His detailed comments and suggestions were immensely helpful for my thesis to reach its final structure. I would like to thank him especially for giving me the academic freedom I needed in order to successfully complete my doctoral thesis. Thank you very much for your constant guidance Prof. Houben.

Prof. Alejandro Pelfinin has been an important source of suggestions and comments. I would like to thank him for his support, and in providing the opportunity to teach at FLACSO Argentina.

Although Prof. Martin Emmer is not connected to my thesis in a formal manner, he was the first person to listen to my PhD proposal and accept me as a PhD student. Thank you for your support and guidance through the early stages of my PhD Prof. Emmer.

Prof. Boike Rehbein's efforts towards initiating the Global Studies Programme(GSP) at the Humboldt University(HU) in Berlin, and providing the first PhD scholarship under the GSP at HU Berlin are very much appreciated by the GSP students. I am one of those students who is extremely thankful to him for providing an opportunity to continue my academic journey.

Prof. Seth Schindler has been a constant source of support and guidance in the early stages of my PhD. Thank you Seth.

I would like to thank Prof. Hermann Schwengel for being a source of inspiration. If not for his dedication towards the GSP at the Freiburg University, I would have never been able to build my academic foundations. It is his vision and ideas which have been an inspiration towards the idea of GSP and my belief in the ideas I have learnt during my GSP years. I would like to thank Prof. Schwengel for starting the GSP at Freiburg University and supporting me every time I knocked on his office door. I would also like to thank Florian Schumacher for his support during my early GSP years. I would also like to thank Prof. Ari Sitas and Prof. Anand Kumar for their support at different stages of my GSP journey.

I would also like to thank all the people who supported me through out my PhD. The friends and family who opened their homes for me during my fieldwork, and strangers who offered their advice. Many individuals in all the

four different countries across four different continents where this research was conducted, have been very helpful and happy to help me undertake this research. The experience of interacting and sharing with each and every contact I made during the fieldwork has been a pleasant experience which I would remember and enjoy through out my life. I would especially like to thank all the interview participants who patitently answered all the questions. Without their input, this PhD would not have been possible.

Friends have been one of the most important sources of support throughout my life. PhD has been a learning and humbling experience. It would have been very difficult to bear the PhD experience without the help and support of all kinds from my dear friends. Although the list of friends is too long, I would like to mention Dr. Adrian Belig and Sebastian Drescher for listening to me with patience and sharing their thoughts. Both of you have been a source of support whenever I needed. Thank you very much Adrian. Thank you very much Sebastian. A special thanks also go to the Hyderabad Rockstars group of friends for keeping me sane in Hyderabad.

The most important thanks I can ever give, go to my family. My brothers Dr. Avinash Thalla and Mohan Thalla have been the strongest source of support of all kinds one can imagine. My parents Uma Maheshwari and Narasimha Dass have always supported me in my decisions, inspite of not always understanding my logic or my decisions. Thank you very much Amma and Nana, for believing in me to take the right decisions. My sister-in-law Vinaya Konda has been an addition of strength and support to our family, including myself. I thank her for sharing the burden of our family and bearing us. The joy of our family for the last two years has been the youngest of us all, Sai Shristi Thalla. Thank you for making us all forget our worries and invigorating us with a new leash of positive energy Shristi. Of all the above, my mother Uma Maheshwari deserves a very special thanks. She is the pillar on which our whole family stands. Thank you Amma, for being who you are, and for helping us become what we are.

My wife Radhika deserves a very speical thanks. She has been a perfect life partner. Thank you very much Radhika, for being patient, understanding and loving. If not for your understanding, it would have been impossible to complete my PhD. I would also like to thank her family for being patient and believing in me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my Hindu Undivided Family(HUF). HUF is a traditional joint Indian Hindu family. Everything I am today, has been a result of the influence of each and every member of my big Indian family. I

would like to thank all the uncles and aunts, grand fathers and grand mothers, cousins, neices, and nephews that I have personally cherished. I would especially like to thank my paternal grand mother Anjamma for being a source of wisdom, and instilling in me the importance of education and goodness from a very young age.

Web Movements and Organic Intellectuals: Influence of digital technologies on political participation

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	9
1.1 Theoretical background	19
1.2 Chapter Outline	22
1.3 Methodology	30
2. Information Age	37
2.1 Network Society	40
2.2 Social Movements	44
2.3 Web Movements	51
2.3.1 Avaaz.org	56
2.3.2 Change.org	59
2.3.3 Online Petitioning	61
3. Antonio Gramsci	65
3.1 Consciousness	67
3.2 Organic Intellectuals	71
3.3 Factory Councils	76
3.4 Web Movements & Factory Councils	82
3.5 Intellectuals and Organic Intellectuals	85
4. Data Analysis and Discussion	89
5. Criticisms	106
5.1 Digital Divide	108
5.2 Clicktivism	117
5.3 Simplification	127
5.4 Sovereignty	131
6. Conclusion	146
Bibliography	166
Appendix	
1. Interview Questionnaire	178

1. Introduction

1.1 Theoretical background

1.2 Chapter Outline

1.3 Methodology

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have made it possible to influence a large number of targeted individuals with limited effort and resources. The Cambridge Analytica expose highlights the confident claims made by private companies (ex: Cambridge Analytica) that they have successfully influenced individual user decisions through digital platforms (ex: Facebook and Google), in order to bring unexpected outcomes in the results of major global political events in the year 2016. The two best examples of their claims are the presidential elections in USA , and referendum in the UK to exit from the European Union (commonly known as Brexit). The fact that many of the citizens of USA and UK thought such results to be highly unlikely, make the claims of such private companies even more worthy of our attention.

It has become public knowledge, that such private companies have been boasting in private client meetings about their ability to target specific individuals and influence the individuals' decisions, known as microtargeting. Their modus operandi is based on huge data banks of millions of individuals' preferences, and the advanced advertising tools provided by digital platforms like Facebook and Google, whose marketing strategies are based on concepts such as microtargeting. They have even given presentations about their microtargeting abilities at public events. Concordia Summit is a good example

of such a public event where these private companies get a platform to advertise themselves to leaders of businesses and political parties from all over the world. Concordia Summit is a well known annual event organized in New York City by a non-profit organization named Concordia, which describes itself as an organization set up for actively fostering, elevating, and sustaining cross-sector partnerships for social impact. They claim that the summit has been a success at gathering the leaders of public, private, and non-profit organizations under one roof to discuss solutions and encourage cooperation for the worlds most urgent problems.

The microtargeting practices were perfected over a period of time in the marketing and consulting businesses, in the process of fighting for out-selling their client's competitors' products and services. Marketing and advertising costs are the highest share of the cost of most of the everyday usage products that are sold in our markets. In some cases, the advertising and marketing costs are much more than the actual cost of producing the product by many times. The focus is on the packaging and brand creation, especially when the product itself is not very different from other similar products sold in the market.

It was only a matter of time such marketing and consulting companies targeted contestants in the political arena, where the huge electoral spending by many candidates across the party spectrum in so many different countries all around the world is a multi billion dollar affair. The possibility of individually specific political advertising at a very low cost, combined with huge war chests of electoral funds raised by contesting candidates in the political arena, has created a situation where individuals may remain ignorant of these political advertising practices at their own peril.

Until recently, such a thought of massive microtargeting would have been unimaginable or absurd for a majority of the global population. In an ever increasing digitalization of the everyday life activities of individuals all around the world, such new developments raise important questions about the skills and abilities of the individuals who are the decision makers in democratic societies all around the world.

Influencing voters is nothing new, and has been attempted in elections through various means since times immemorial. But such attempts to influence them were visible and clearly recognizable by the voters as an attempt to influence their voting decisions. Also, while most of such influencing attempts were society wide level discussions on major electoral issues, personal outreach activities were clear about their intentions. But, internet has made it possible for the personal outreach activities to be conducted in a manner that the individuals being targeted may not even realize that their voting decisions are being influenced.

While individuals could easily ignore or avoid giving attention to political campaigns before the internet, on digital platforms like Facebook it is almost impossible to do it. Even videos being played on Facebook are interrupted by advertisements which have to be completely watched, if one wishes to watch the remaining part of the video. There is no option to block these advertisements, or even to skip them. While the same method is employed by TV channels, the viewer has the option to change the channel for few minutes and knows exactly where to go back after few minutes to continue watching their programme, successfully avoiding the advertisement. But with Facebook aggressively buying out every other young platform of even a remote sense of competition to its own business, it is being recognized as a global monopoly with no competition. In such a monopolistic market, the users do not have the

option to even move to a different platform to wait for the advertisement to run out, which is available with the TV channels.

In a society, where large private business entities hold a massive influence on a large percentage of its members, it becomes very important to realize that such individual members can no longer remain passive receivers of information. It is very important that they are able to observe the intentions of the messages being shown to them, and the parties who are paying to show them such messages. In other words, it is in the best interests of the individual members of such society to be critical about what they are being advertised and who is paying for such advertisements.

While Facebook is just one of the examples of such large private business entities, and Google is another, in our present society which is based majorly on the internet, almost every source of communication on almost all the major media outlets is trying to exact very similar influence on the individual members of the society. It is this understanding about the urgent necessity of the individual's critical questioning and understanding abilities, which was one of the main factors that motivated and helped shape this research.

Critical questioning and understanding abilities, here, mean an ability to question and understand the latest trends of the society. As the social processes are being increasingly dominated by few private corporations which are interested in maximizing their profits even at the expense of the welfare of the individual members of the society, if individual members fail in any aspect of questioning or understanding the latest developments of our society, in the future, the private interests of few corporations will dominate the interests of everyone else. There is a strong possibility of them abusing their position of

dominance at the cost of the individual members of the society.

The actions of electoral candidates and their marketing consulting associates are not just a one way street. The traffic goes in both directions. Similar to them, many not-for-profit or social organizations are using the internet to influence the decisions of the electoral candidates and elected representatives, and are also aiming to change the general direction of the arguments on various issues in the society.

While the top down approach is being pursued by electoral candidates to place themselves in positions of political power with support from the liberalization supporters such as big businesses with a quid pro quo approach benefiting them both, the bottom up approach is being pursued by individuals who wish to reverse the trend and prioritize individuals over markets by making the markets work for the benefit of the individual citizens again. Good examples of such organizations are online petitioning platforms like avaaz.org, change.org, one.org, getup.org, kampact.de, etc. These organizations can be viewed as a result of an attempt at political globalization from the bottom, as political globalization from top has been constantly eroding from the already not so strong foundations of organizations which were started with a global perspective, eg. the United Nations Organization.

Such bottom up attempts at bringing back different aspects of society back under the control of its individual citizens are not completely new, or unimagined before. Such ideas have been articulated before. Some have thought about it from the perspective of re-positioning individuals as the priority and bringing all other aspects of society to work for the general wellbeing of the individuals and the society. One of the popular examples of such former ideas is presented

in the form of Karl Polyani's 'Double Movement'. Such bottom up ideas for re-positioning the individuals as the priority are the other main factor which helped shape this research.

This research highlights Polyani's work especially because of its resurgence among the contemporary scholars in an attempt to understand the latest developments in the aspects of political globalization from the bottom (Patomäki 2014; Worth 2013; Levien & Paret 2012; Lacher 2008). One of the most well known contemporary economists, Joseph E. Stiglitz, has also supported Polanyi's analysis (Polyani 2001). An institute was also established in 1988 to highlight the importance of his work, the Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec.

Polyani was an Austro-Hungarian philosopher who was well known for his opposition to traditional economic thought. The 'Double Movement' was a concept based on his observation of the industrialization process in 19th century England. It is a concept which Karl Polyani described in his book "The Great Transformation" (Polyani 2001). It suggested the idea that high levels of predatory economic liberalism would be countered by demands for an equally high level of protectionist measures which would balance the functions of market economy. The term 'Double' refers to the 'two' phases in which changes happened in opposite directions in the 19th century English society. The disembedding of the economy allowing the unfettered rule of the market over the economy was recognized as the first of the two phases of the double movement, and because of the adverse impacts of the first phase on the individual members of the society, an attempt was made by some of them to improve their situation using the political process. This attempt was recognized as the second phase of

the double movement, which resulted in bringing back the economy in the service of the society, ultimately leading to the welfare state.

"While on the one hand markets spread all over the face of the globe . . . on the other hand a network of measures and policies was integrated into powerful institutions designed to check the action of the market. . . . a deep-seated movement sprang into being to resist the pernicious effects of a market-controlled economy." (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 80). The individual members of the then English society were able to correct the adverse impacts of the unfettered rule of the market over the economy because of the existence of a political structure which allowed the most important part of any human society (i.e., the humans, the people, the individual members of the society) to do what was needed to take care of themselves. The 'social contract' of modern human society is supposed to work in exactly this very manner (Habermas 1989).

While the above concept of Polyani's 'Double Movement' helped us to understand the situation in 19th century England as a rather simple to and fro movement of society, where the societal structure helped to maintain a balance between the economy and politics; the societal structure in our present times is a lot more fluid. The changes brought about because of the technological developments of our era, which has been termed as the era of 'digital revolution', have made the 21st century society a lot more complex compared to the historical era of 'industrial revolution' when Polyani made his observations. The most important of the differences between these two time periods would be the development of the internet. The internet has had unimaginable effects on almost all aspects of our society, such as the economy, culture, education, politics, etc.

Within our present context of the late 20th and early 21st century, the global expansion of capital markets made possible by the internet, combined with liberalization, have destroyed the abilities of individual countries to be able to offer protection to their own national economies, culture, security, and most importantly their citizens. This situation can be reasonably argued as similar to the first phase of the 'Double Movement' described above, and the increasing protests, revolts, mass social movements, etc., as the natural reaction of the individual members of the society to reverse the adverse affects of the first phase, i.e., the second phase. The Seattle WTO protests were one of the earliest examples, while the 'Occupy' movement is one of the most visible and loudest examples of the actions being taken as part of the second phase of the 'Double Movement'.

Such a 'Double Movement' has moved out of activist circles and even reached the conscious of the society in general. In a recent article published on 5th April 2018 on The Guardian, the author Rana Dasgupta, an acclaimed writer and a visiting lecturer at Princeton and Brown Universities, claims the demise of the nation state (Dasgupta 2018). Although there is no dearth of academic scholars discussing the demise or decline of the nation states, where some scholarly articles talk about globalization and its effects on the nation state hinting at an end of the nation state system, while some others argue against it (Mann 2011; Shaw 2011; Biswas 2010; Brinkman & Brinkman 2008; Hirst & Thompson 2006); Dasgupta's article claiming the demise of the nation state presents a very succinct picture of the situation as of today and raises many aspects of this debate. It ends with highlighting the necessity to build a political structure at a global level if we are willing to handle the most important issues of our present times, like terrorism, global warming, refugee problems, etc.

The article presents some points which explain the exact situation of our times. For example, the article suggests that the existing political structures are a legacy of 20th century which are falling short in handling the new developments of the 21st century ocean of deregulated finance, autonomous technology, religious militancy and great power rivalry. It also highlights the loss of control of the national political authority over money flow and suggests the former as a result of the latter. The crisis of our nation-state system is presented as a reason for the 65 million refugees, a new normal, compared to the old emergency of the second world war which saw 40 million refugees. The unwillingness of the society to even acknowledge this as a crisis, is reflected in the article by highlighting the major political processes being initiated in rich nations of the world in opposition to the refugees.

While all the above describe the existing undesirable situation, the article suggests that the ideas for finding solutions are hard to be found. The existing pattern of distribution of the planetary wealth and resources is not even opposed by any political mechanism. Without a meaningful innovation in the political processes, global capital and technology will rule the world without any kind of democratic consultation just as the rising oceans will force us into submission. In order to be able to find any kind of solutions, the existing political system must be supported with global financial regulations and transnational political mechanisms. It is the most plausible way forward to complete the existing level of incomplete globalization. The economic and technological systems of the globalization are dazzling, but to really serve the human community, they must be subordinated to a similarly dazzling political infrastructure which we have not even begun to imagine.

The article further points at three of the most worsening crisis of our times. The breakdown of the rich countries due to their reducing national political power due to the global forces, is the first. The second being the volatility faced by the poorest countries, and the third being the illegitimacy of an international order that has never really aspired to be a society of nations governed by the rule of law. It highlights that the national state has traditionally been a story of tax innovation, and the next such innovation has to come in the transnational sphere. The transnational money flows have to be taxed in order to build the political infrastructure needed to handle the economic and technological globalization and make them work for the human community again. Attention has to be given also to newer ways of redistributing the already created global wealth among the citizens of the globe as it happens as of now at the level of national societies. The article concludes by suggesting that the present level of economic and technological globalization has taught us many new lessons which can be used to build the political infrastructure of our integrated world system.

Based on the above mentioned two main factors which helped shape this research, this research started with an idea to explore the innovative methods and tools facilitated by digital media, and took up the research question: how are digital technologies helping in the development process of organic intellectuals? It started with the hypothesis that multiple stakeholders are using digital media to enhance democratic political participation and the ability of citizens to make better political decisions.

The three main stakeholders influencing democratic political participation were recognized as the initiators of such digital media based tools and processes, citizens who use those tools and processes, and elected representatives who are the targets of the above two stakeholders. The main focus was supposed to be

on the factors that directed the attention of the initiators towards these processes and how they promoted them, what were the factors that encouraged the citizens to accept these processes, and how was it influencing the political participation processes and the above mentioned three stakeholders. If possible, to also go beyond this to explore the intended and un-intended consequences of these processes. Realizing the enormity of these explorations and the timeframe of a doctoral thesis, it was decided to select one specific part relating to the citizen's participation in these processes for this doctoral dissertation, as the first step of the overall research plan.

1.1 Theoretical background

The necessity of this overall research was based on many academic works dealing with the above mentioned two major directions of thought. With the dramatic acceleration of globalization and its effects on the world, there has been a rapid rise in the attempts being made towards developing new modes of governance. Nation states have approached this problem by increasing the number of international rules, norms and structures resulting in a number of multilateral treaties and intergovernmental agreements over the years (Zurn 2003). Still, there is an increasing recognition among scholars and policy makers that there is a need for new and better international institutions (Görg & Hirsch 2011; Gould 2009; Blühdrön 2009; Held 2006; Castells 2005; Sassen 2002; Stiglitz 2002; Murphy 2000).

Scholars increasingly advocate major reforms to the present structures of governance at an international level. Acclaimed scholars like Jurgen Habermas (1991) and David Held (2006) argue that the contemporary unregulated

transnational economic activity challenges the gains of the democratization process of the last century. To restore and extend the benefits of democratization they suggest the extension of the democratic forms beyond the nation state system. While this deals with the what, the how of it is also attracting an equal number of well known scholars like Carol Gould (2009) and Ingolfur Blühdorn (2009).

Internet and modern communication related technological advancements have removed many of the problems and limitations of a well networked public sphere, which can now be organized on a global scale (Castells 1997; Sassen 2002). Some have optimistically written about the internet as a means of organisation, even across geographical locations, and to work towards a democratic counter-force to the hijacking of politics by vested interests (Castells 1997; Giddens 2005). At the same time, some have been pessimistic about the diluting effects of internet on collective decision making. They argue that with technological advancements people are able to filter information according to their interests and preferences, and they will not be able to converge towards one majority decision, leading to a lack of collective decision making (Sunstein 2001; Pariser 2010).

These debates have existed since the birth of broadcast media, which was heralded as enabling democratic accountability or diverting meaningful political participation. Nevertheless, scholars (Castells 1997; Sassen 2002) see the internet as a powerful tool that could potentially change the way society interacts and participates. It could help to overcome the challenges to democracy in this modern, complex, and diverse present day society. These kinds of internet societies, by whatever name they might be called, either "network society" or "digital networks", their importance and relevance in

political, social and cultural terms is unquantifiable (Castells 1997; Sassen 2002). Froomkin (2004) states that the internet can bring power back to the public sphere, away from the other systems, and asks: *"Could it be that emerging technologies will enable new types of Internet-based discourses that generate the communicative power Habermas argues is needed to educate and mobilize citizens to demand that their governments make better and more legitimate decision?"*

While there is increasing scholarly interest in online activism and its impact on politics (Coleman & Blumer 2009; Carpentier 2011; Wright 2012), there is little scholarship on new online petitioning platforms, particularly at the global level. Works relating to petitioning studied it as it was used in the 18th century (Bailey 1976), as a tool for understanding history (Voss 2001), within the European Parliament (Sommier 2011), and as used by the UK governments (Miller 2008; Wright 2012; Ellison & Hardey 2013). This research intends to fill this gap by conducting an empirical study of online petitioning platforms which are working at the global level.

One of the main intentions of this research is to understand the working model and ideology of new organizations which are trying to utilize the internet for improving public communication, mobilization, deliberation and participation in society. These kinds of organizations have not attracted significant scholarly attention till date. Main reasons for selecting online petitioning platforms for this study are their flexible and global model, extensive usage of technology, the dramatic increase in their membership, and increasing number of studies showing the disconnect between public interest and government decisions. Technology has altered society in many ways but political structures are yet to fully adapt. By researching online petitioning platforms, this study wants to

understand the innovative functioning model of the particular model being studied, its mechanisms of interaction with the existing governance structures in different geographical regions, and the perspectives of different participants.

For undertaking this research, the works of Manuel Castells and Antonio Gramsci have been foundational. While Manuel Castells' trilogy about digital technologies and their impact on society 'The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture' published from 1996-1998 is one pillar of this research, Antonio Gramsci's theoretical work about the knowledge which can mobilize political movements that have the power to bring about a radical transformation in society is the other pillar of this research. Castells' focus on the ideas of 'New World', 'Network Society', and 'Informationalism', are as important for this research as Gramsci's focus on concepts such as 'intellectuals', 'common sense', 'consciousness', 'subalternity', 'hegemony' , and 'historical bloc'. While all these concepts of Gramsci have been immensely helpful for designing this research, especially the analysis of the concepts of 'consciousness' and 'organic intellectuals' have been its anchors, because of the opportunity they present to understand the foundational aspects of Gramsci's larger theoretical perspective. They help explain how individuals begin with the process of transformation that could ultimately lead towards a new hegemony. All these concepts are explained in detail in the following chapters.

1.2 Chapter Outline

The second chapter of this research, focuses on the concepts explained in the works of Manuel Castells. His books which have guided this research include his famous trilogy towards the end of the last millennium which explains in

detail his perspective about the impact of digital technologies on the society, and move on to his works in the first decade of the new millennium where he builds on his trilogy and focuses on the communication tools and patterns in society. The three volumes of his trilogy are, *The rise of the network society* (Castells 1996), *The power of identity* (Castells 1997), and *End of millennium* (Castells 1998). As the titles of the first two parts of the trilogy suggest, they are focused on the concepts of network society and how the identity of individuals is being affected because of the technological revolutions happening in the society. The final volume ends up tying all the loose ends of the previous two volumes bringing the trilogy to a logical conclusion, or to a new beginning, depending on the perspective of the reader.

Castells continues with his work on the foundations built in the above trilogy in his book 'Communication Power' published in 2009 (Castells 2009). In this book, Castells presents a theoretical framework built on three aspects: the structural determinants of social and political power in the global network society, the structural determinants of the process of mass communication under the organizational, cultural, and technological conditions of our time, and lastly, the cognitive processing of the signals presented by the communication system to the human mind as it relates to politically relevant social practice. This research is specifically interested in the last of the above three points which deals with how individuals relate to politics based on their internal cognitive responses to the dominant communication systems of the society.

The other book from Castells which gets a prominent mention in this research is relating to his analysis of some of the famous social movements whose success was attributed to digital technologies, *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the Internet Age*, published in the year 2012 (Castells,

2012). Building upon all the theoretical concepts discussed above, this chapter ends with talking about *Web Movements*, and *online petitioning platforms*, giving a brief account of two of the major global online petitioning platforms, Avaaz.org and Change.org.

Antonio Gramsci's theoretical work about the knowledge which can mobilize political movements that have the power to bring about a radical transformation in society occupies the third chapter of this research. Gramsci's focus on concepts such as 'intellectuals', 'traditional and organic intellectuals', 'factory councils', 'common sense', 'consciousness', 'subalternity', 'hegemony', and 'historical bloc', especially the analysis of his concepts of 'consciousness' and 'organic intellectuals', are explained in detail. The special interest of this research in these two concepts is because of the opportunity they present to understand the foundational aspects of Gramsci's larger theoretical perspective. They help explain how individuals begin with the process of transformation which could ultimately lead towards a new hegemony.

As this research considers that a new hegemony is under creation, and is trying to understand the first steps that are being undertaken towards the creation of a new hegemony, the concepts of 'consciousness' and 'organic intellectuals' are the appropriate tools of the overall Gramscian framework that will be able to help explain the aspects being studied by this research. Herein lies the uniqueness of this research. Based on the analysis presented, this research *argues that the web movements are similar to factory councils; and these web movements are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses to become organic intellectuals themselves.*

In simple words, the above hypothesis is arguing that a new kind of social movements are not only introducing individuals from within the masses to new political and social topics, and raising their interest and activity in political education and participation, but also enabling their ability to learn, discuss, deliberate, share, and organize themselves for making the political institutions of the society to work for their interests.

The above argument means that the emerging counter hegemonic idea is still in the early stages of striving to overthrow the existing hegemony and become the new hegemony. Here the emerging counter hegemonic idea is that the existing governance structure is working in the interests of the few super rich and against the interests of the majority of the society; and the existing hegemony is that the existing governance structure, i.e., neo-liberal globalization, is working in the interests of the whole society and will eventually work towards the benefit of all sections of the society in spite of the existing negative effects of the ideology which are seen as temporary stages towards reaching its ultimate goal of working for the benefit of all sections of the society.

The emerging counter hegemonic idea is at a stage where it has acquired the cultural and ideological support from a large number of individuals of the society. It is now aiming towards turning the cultural and ideological support into a political project by objecting to the decisions taken by the elected representatives if the decisions do not seem to be in the best interests of a majority of the sections of the society or proposing new policies which will turn the governance towards the interests of a majority of sections of the society. Most of the mass street demonstrations, signing petitions, and writing letters to elected representatives that are gaining such huge attention from the individuals from different corners of the world are some of the examples of such political

projects.

The fourth chapter takes up the task of presenting the data collected, and the analysis from the data gathered as part of the fieldwork for this research in order to test the presented hypothesis. It is within the fourth chapter that the interpretation of the gathered data allows the author to claim that the hypothesis is validated.

The fifth chapter will also be the final chapter of the core of this research. It deals with the major criticisms that have been raised by many scholars regarding the usage of digital technologies in the political field. An emerging concept known as 'Connective Action' is presented in comparison with the traditional concept of 'Collective Action' in the political arena, especially the focus of 'Connective Action' on the idea that the traditional concepts of political participation, as a process of conflict between different view points or group interests in order to arrive at a common ground and reach a consensus, are unable to help us understand the contemporary methods of political participation by individuals focusing on personalization and individualization of political matters. The criticisms that are highlighted are Digital Divide, Clicktivism, Simplification, and Sovereignty. These criticisms are then tested based on the analysis of the data collected as part of the fieldwork for this research.

While Digital Divide, Clicktivism, and Simplification are the better known criticisms of political participation through digital mediums, Sovereignty is a rather undeveloped and under discussed aspect within this perspective. As such, it receives special focus in this research. Since many of the online petitions started by many of the popular online petitioning platforms such as Avaaz.org

are gathering signatures all over the world and present them to local and nationally elected leaders to act on specific causes, there arises an issue of how an elected representative of one region or nation is being demanded to act on issues by citizens of more than one nation. This basic commonsensical question is often rebuked based on a simple assumption that such an action is based on solidarity and does not need any serious thought. The author of this work has been baffled with such visible lack of importance for this aspect, and the attention it did not raise even after raising the issue during multiple discussions with colleagues and fellow scholars.

Questions relating to the above aspect of Sovereignty have garnered very interesting responses from the interview participants of this research. The responses present a new development that has almost never been highlighted in any of the other research. Of course the main reasons for it is also because such a question has never been taken up by any other research, most probably based on their belief that it is a very simple matter of solidarity with fellow human beings. Most of the participants of online petitions which were dealing with such a local or national issue and gathering signatures from individuals all over the world were of the opinion that they had the right to demand such action from the local or national level elected representatives of even other nations of which they were not citizens or even remotely connected, as long as the topic of the online petition was relating, even remotely, anything to do with nature and fundamental rights. Nature here includes almost anything and everything related to the earth, animals, forests, oceans, etc., of that sort, and fundamental rights includes almost anything and everything related to human rights, animal rights, environmental rights, etc., of that sort.

The above mentioned right to demand such action from even elected

representative of other nations or even remote local regions far away from their geographical location, was based on their strong belief that the topics relating to any of the above themes have a global impact and influence each and every living organism including all the animals, plants, and humans on Earth. The main point to observe here being that their action was based not on solidarity as was imagined by many until now, but based on a feeling of a right to demand such an action. This rights perspective in comparison to the existing solidarity perspective raises a major point of contention.

Even when it was stressed by the interviewer that they were not the citizens of those countries whose elected representatives were being asked to act on the issue, the interview participants were highlighting with clarity that they do not need to be the citizens of any one country to demand an action from the elected representative of that specific country. They believed that they had the right to demand such action based on the fact that when the people being asked to act on the issue were elected representatives of the region or nation in which the issue is being raised and the topic of the petition has an influence all over the globe, even individuals from other nations would have a right to demand them to act in the interest of not only their own electorate but also the individuals of the whole world. So, they believed that although the elected representatives were elected by the locally registered voters, the elected representatives had responsibility towards the population of the whole world and not just for the locally registered voters.

This research makes a start by introducing the issue and problematizing it in this specific context. It attacks the general assumption that a global action in support of local issues done through most of these new organizations is based on solidarity. Using a qualitative empirical research, it presents a different

perspective focused on the right to demand action based on an identification of global citizenship or community that most of the participants of these new organizations hold and base their actions upon.

This new perspective allows us to imagine a new structure that might make it possible to solve the contemporary issues which need a global response. It brings into discussion not the traditionally understood concept of a global citizenship, but a new kind of global citizenship that is based on the self belief of the individual persons all over the world to have the right to demand action from elected representatives of not only their political unit but also from any national, regional or local geographical and political jurisdictions as well. It is about their connection with not only the other humans of the world but also all natural things on earth. A belief that all those things within nature such as even forests, rivers or mountains are living beings and how humans treat them has an influence on the well being of the whole planet, including the humans.

Based on this kind of rights perspective of the individuals participating in the online petitions from any part of the world, an argument can definitely be raised that these online petitioning platforms are questioning the sovereign authority of institutions such as nation states and their leaders. It is forcing their leaders to act in line with the beliefs of the individuals from all over the world signing online petitions targeting them, and not just in the interests of a part or whole of their own electorate to whom they are constitutionally accountable.

Finally, the conclusion chapter brings together all the points discussed in the previous five chapters. It also presents some new directions in which this

research can be taken, highlighting the larger research plan of the author outlined earlier in this chapter.

1.3 Methodology

To be able to study a topic such as consciousness of individuals, which is dependent on beliefs and opinions of individuals, a qualitative study based on indepth semi-structured interviews was deemed to be the best option for collecting the data needed to conduct this research, based on the theory about research methods. In spite of the criticism of some colleagues that asking the individuals might result in them saying what they consider as what the interviewer wants to hear, for understanding the personal motivations and intentions of individuals, asking them directly was thought to be the best way ahead. Previous practical knowledge of the interviewer in conducting qualitative interviews also helped to make the decision that it would be the right method for reaching the goals of this particular kind of research.

Ethical aspects regarding conducting a qualitative research were given a major consideration during the planning of this research. Some of the individuals approached for conducting the interviews presented doubts about the motivations of the research, and concern about their privacy. The researcher understood these reservations very well and was very clear in sharing with the interview participants that there will never be any names mentioned in the research findings, and all their replies will only be used for the purpose of understanding the motivations and expectations of this particular method of participation in general. This answer satisfied most of the individual interview participants. As such, the findings of this research never mention any names at all. Each partici-

pant is codified as the first alphabet of the city followed by a number. In some cases, the participant also asked about the origins of the study and its sponsors, if any. In such instances, it was made clear to the interview participants that the interviewer has no connection with any of the online petitioning platforms and the study is being undertaken purely because of the interest of the interviewer to understand this phenomenon as part of a doctoral research funded by a university scholarship.

One of the participants who agreed to do the interview, was against any kind of recording of the voice, but was okay if the responses were noted on paper. So, in that case, the interview was not recorded and answers were collected on paper. In one particular case, the interview participant did not mind giving the interview, but did not want any kind of recording of replies at all, not even on paper. So, the interview was not done formally, and a casual discussion about the topic was undertaken to know his/her perspective. This case is not included in the interview participants list of this research. Some others informed the interviewer that they were giving the interview in good faith, and some suggested that they were doing it for supporting research and pursuit of knowledge that will be useful for the society. Many of the interview participants were very interested in knowing what would be the outcome of this research, and requested the interviewer to share with them the final outcome. The interviewer very gladly promised to send them a digital copy of the final outcome of the research.

For the geographical areas to conduct the fieldwork for this research, this research zeroed in on Brazil, USA, Germany, and India. These countries were selected mainly because each of these countries has the highest number of participants within their respective continents, on one of the most popular

global online petitioning platform, Avaaz.org. Avaaz, which calls itself a campaigning community and a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision making everywhere, claims to have been successfully impacting policy at local, national and global levels on specific issues based on collective and individual citizen support from all parts of the world.

The research even began with an intention to find participants in each of the above four countries who have signed petitions from Avaaz.org. In Brazil, it was no problem finding the interview participants. One in every four to five individuals approached by the interviewer knew about Avaaz.org. But the situation was quite different in the USA. After couple of weeks of asking around for Avaaz.org, and realizing that many did not know Avaaz.org but had signed petitions on other online petitioning platforms, it was decided to include participants of any online petitioning platforms in general. Change.org was the most popular petitioning platform in the USA. It turned out that this was a good decision to ask for online petitioning platforms in general as against one particular platform, as the interviewer found an experience similar to the USA in India and Germany as well.

To keep the sample to be representative of the national populations, two main cities of the selected countries were chosen. The idea was to include the political and financial capitals of the selected countries. Political capital was one of the two cities that became the place of fieldwork in all the selected countries, except for Brazil where Rio was selected in place of Brasilia to correct the rather high concentration of bureaucratic population of Brasilia. Rio being the capital city of Brazil, before Brasilia was built for the specific purpose of administration purposes, it became the better choice to find a more appropriate representation of ordinary citizens of the country. In a similar

fashion to the first city of the fieldwork, financial capitals were the second city in all the selected countries, except for USA where New York turned out to be a surprisingly hard place to find individuals who were active on online petitioning platforms. So, the Bay Area around the city of San Francisco was selected keeping in view the technologically savvy population in that area.

The interview questionnaire was the most important research tool for this research. In order to conduct interviews which aimed at understanding the beliefs and opinions of individual, it was necessary to familiarize with the interview participants and know a bit about their background. So, the first part of the questionnaire was a small set of questions related to understanding the interview participant's background focusing on age, education, and profession. In total, there were 5 questions in this section.

The next section of the questionnaire was the main part, which dealt with the questions relating to the beliefs and opinions of the interview participants regarding their participation on online petitioning platforms. This was the longest of all the parts of the questionnaire with 23 main questions. As this research was using a semi-structured interview, for almost half of the questions in this section, there were follow up questions to clarify the answers given by the participants or get more detailed information about the topic.

Finally, to get a basic understanding of the previous social and political background of the participants, a last set of questions relating to the previous social and political activities of the participants were included in the questionnaire. There were 4 questions in this section, with all of them having further follow up questions. So, the questionnaire had a sum of 32 questions in total, as part of three sections.

In order to follow a specific pattern of selecting the individual interview participants, and to increase the representativeness of the cities in which the interviews were being conducted, it was decided to use a random sampling method. To make it more spread out, the interviews were conducted in different parts of the selected cities. The interviewer would visit different localities and approach individuals relaxing in public places such as parks and squares. As the questionnaire was pretty long, some of the participants requested to meet later at a different place such as a coffee shop or restaurant to give the interview. Some of the interview participants were also introduced by acquaintances made in the selected cities during the time spent there as part of the research fieldwork.

The analysis of the data collected was undertaken after completing the collection of the data in all the four countries. All the interviews were codified and collected in an excel sheet in simple answers, in order to do the analysis easily and quickly. Although the overall picture became clear only after this exercise at the end of the data collection process, each completed interview gave a sense of a kind of pattern evolving within the replies of the interview participant's answers. Many times though, a new interview participant would give a reply that would force to rethink the previous patterns. This process happened many times over the course of the research work. In spite of all this, it can be said that the real patterns became getting clearer going into the last country of fieldwork. The patterns became even more clear during the actual writing of the thesis, as and when each aspect of the questionnaire was being analyzed and compared with all the answers collected.

While each and every question of the questionnaire was included for gathering

information on a particular aspect of the overall research, it became clear that the replies of the interview participants were intertwined. During the analysis of the gathered data, it became clear that replies of some of the questions were connected to replies given for some of the other questions of the research. This realization was not even evident to the interviewer after collecting the data. It showed itself only during the analysis of the data was being undertaken, making the understanding of the interviewer richer.

The above introduction about the ideas that motivated this research, the theories and authors that helped to build the foundations of this research, and the tools and methods used to conduct and analyze this research makes clear the preparation put into undertaking this research. The following second chapter of this research, The Information Age, extends this introduction further into the realm of digital technologies. It is focused on highlighting the influence internet has made on the society, and makes possible the emerging of the new hegemony that is at the center of the study of this research.

2. The Information Age

2.1 Network Society

2.2 Social Movements

2.3 Web Movements

2.3.1 Avaaz.org

2.3.2 Change.org

2.3.3 Online Petitioning

2. The Information Age

'The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture' is the name of a trilogy written by the world renowned sociologist Manuel Castells, published close to the end of the second millennium, between the years 1996 – 1998. The conclusion of the trilogy highlights the genesis of a *New World*; and by *New World* Castells refers to the major political, social, economic and cultural changes of the time, with a strong focus on the changes brought about by the rising influence of technological developments on all aspects of society. Computers and the silicon chips that run them, the latest mobile telecommunication instruments, globally integrated financial markets reacting to each other in real time, etc. are some of the examples of the technological developments that he is referring to.

Manuel Castells is one of the most-cited scholars in the Social Sciences. According to the International Sociological Association website, the 2000-2009 research survey of the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) ranks Castells as the world's fifth most-cited social science scholar, and the foremost-cited communication scholar. He is mainly active in the information society and communication research, and has had a major influence in this area of research. He has authored 23 books, and co-authored and edited another 22 books. He is

currently Professor of Sociology, and Director of the Internet Interdisciplinary Institute at the Open University of Catalonia (OUC), in Barcelona. The focus of this research on the role that internet is playing in the current society, especially its influence on internet mediated political globalization, meant that the concepts presented by Castells have been a foundation for building this research.

The *New World*, as presented by Castells, "originated in the historical coincidence of three independent processes: the information technology revolution; the economic crisis of both capitalism and statism, and their subsequent restructuring; and the blooming of cultural social movements, such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism." (Castells 1998 : 336). According to him, these processes interacted between themselves to bring about a new societal structure called the network society, a new economy that acted at the global level based on the foundations of an information infrastructure such as the Internet, and a new culture of real virtuality. By real virtuality, Castells means a system in which people's existence i.e., reality, is immersed in a virtual world. This virtual world is a part of reality for people because it spreads the images that shape their behavior and induce actions of the people.

According to Castells, the drastic changes brought about by the technological developments in the last quarter of the twentieth century resulted in an information technology revolution. The style, belief and attitude of this revolution was that almost everything in society was dependent on information technology, and the future developments in all parts of the society would be developed through it. Castells calls it Informationalism, the pillar on which the *New World* stood. The generation of wealth, power, and culture were all

dependent on the technological capacities of the individuals and their societies. The networking logic introduced by the information technology advancements were indispensable for organization of human activity and the processes of social, economic and cultural restructuring of society.

The crisis of capitalism and statism, that were also happening at the same time, resulted in the efforts for their restructuring using the developments in information technology. The new information technologies facilitated the evolution of capitalism into a more flexible form by providing the infrastructure for global networking, making possible real time communication, storing and analyzing huge amounts of information, coordinating the work of individuals spread across the globe, and making possible the simultaneous concentration and decentralization of decision making (Castells 1998 : 337). With the end of statism, the evolved form of capitalism easily spread throughout the world becoming the dominant form of organization in all sections of society at a global level. Castells calls this Informational Capitalism, which relies on innovation for improving productivity, and globalized competitiveness for creating and appropriating wealth selectively in a network of globally connected exchanges.

In tune with the technological and economic transformation of the society, strong social movements were also growing in many parts of the world. They were mostly cultural movements aimed at changing the values of society focusing on social injustice. Their ideas resulted in the increased focus on environmentalism, feminism, human rights, sexual liberation, ethnic equality and grassroots democracy. Their libertarian spirit and cultural openness resulted in the individualized and decentralized uses of technology for sharing their rejection of the values of patriarchalism, religious traditionalism, and

nationalism and accepting of values of cosmopolitanism and internationalism.

Networks are the new foundational structures of this *New World* according to Castells. Although he points out that networks have always existed as a means of social organization, he clarifies his focus on the network society by defining it as a society where the main social structures and activities are based on information networks which process and manage information using micro-electronic based technologies. This focus on information networks is the characteristic feature of the theorizing of Castells' which is the outermost structure of a theoretical framework for building this research .

2.1 Network Society

The concept of Network Society as a new societal structure of our societies is the focus of not just Manuel Castells, but quite a few other prominent sociologists as well, although Castells is one of the well known sociologists who have worked on the concept. Jan van Dijk, a sociologist from Netherlands who has been investigating the social aspects of information and communication technology has been an early and continuous contributor to the concept of Network Society. His conception is that our societies are still becoming into a Network Society and are not there yet, as compared to Castells' who envisions that Network Society is already here. Barry Wellman, another Canadian sociologist has also worked with the concept of network society, although his focus has mostly been on studying society as a network and the increasing presence of information technology in our societies.

In Jan van Dijk's book *The Network Society*(1999, 2012) network society was

defined as a form of society that is increasingly organizing its relationships in media networks, which are gradually merging with the social networks of face-to-face communication (Dijk 1999, 2012). Whereas according to Castells, the process of formation and exercise of power relationships is decisively transformed in the new organizational and technological context. This context is derived from the rise of global digital networks of communication as the fundamental symbol-processing system of our time. The network society is the social structure that characterizes society in the early twenty-first century, a social structure constructed around digital networks of communication. This focus on digital networks of communication is the reason Castells' conception of Network Society is selected as the basis of this research.

Building on his trilogy, in his later book 'Communication Power' (Castells 2009) Manuel Castells presents a theoretic framework built around 3 aspects: the structural determinants of social and political power in the global network society, the structural determinants of the process of mass communication under the organizational, cultural, and technological conditions of our time, and lastly, the cognitive processing of the signals presented by the communication system to the human mind as it relates to politically relevant social practice.

While the first aspect conceptualizes our present society as the network society, which is to the information age what the industrial society was to the industrial age; the second aspect focuses on the analysis of communication exploring the relationship between the transformation of the media audience from receptors of messages to senders/receivers of messages and the process of cultural change in our world. But the most interesting aspect for this research is the third, which attempts to understand how the human mind processes the communication messages, and how this processing translates to political realm. He goes about

this job, by analyzing the specific relationships between emotion, cognition, and politics. His assumption is that the greater the autonomy provided to the users by the technologies of communication, the greater the chances that new values and new interests will enter the realm of socialized communication, so reaching the public mind. Thus, the rise of mass self-communication, as he calls the new forms of networked communication, enhances the opportunities for social change.

My research takes the above aspect as one of the bases for conducting an empirical research in order to find out if the greater autonomy provided by technologies of communication are indeed resulting in the spread of new values.

Castells sees the origin of the political mobilization and action in the human mind. "the most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind. The way we feel and think determines the way we act, both individually and collectively.....The ability to build consent, or at least to instill fear and resignation vis-a-vis the existing order, is essential to enforce the rules that govern the institutions and organizations of society. And these rules, in all societies, manifest the power relationships embedded in the institutions as a result of processes of struggle and compromise between conflicting social actors who mobilize for their interests under the banner of their values." (Castells 2009 : 3). Such mobilization leads to the participation of individuals of a society in the political sphere, through their political participation.

Political participation is a term which has no universally accepted definition. Different researchers have used different definitions. Riley et al. (2010) have presented it as a set of rights and duties involving formally organized civic and

political activities. Clarke et al. (2004) defined political participation as voluntary action done by individuals alone or as a group to express their political attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. One of the most accepted versions of the definition about political participation comes from an established pair of researchers in this area, Verba and Nie. They have defined political participation as those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take (Verba & Nie 1972).

Although elections and voting behavior attract the attention of many researchers, other forms of associations relating to political engagement of a broader sense have also been studied extensively as part of research on political participation. Contemporary research on this topic has included extremist and aggressive forms of political participation activism as compared to the traditional focus on citizen roles and civil duties. While traditional forms of political participation studied by researchers included membership of political parties or community based organizations or contacting local politicians, examples of more aggressive forms of political participation include online petitioning and campaigning, unplanned street protests, political consumerism and lifestyle politics.

The predominantly existing representative system of political participation needs the citizens to elect personnel, but it hardly gives much freedom to select the actions taken by the elected/selected personnel. Not surprisingly, majority of the political participation literature has been traditionally focused on elections. However, with the blossoming of a liberal democratic culture and values in economically better off societies, the focus of the researchers has been on the idea that broad participation in the decision making processes is a

necessary condition for a proper democratic governance (Dahl 1971, 1998; Pateman 1970). So, in economically better off societies of the northern European countries and USA, political participation literature has been seeing an influx of research focused on changes in the participatory practices and values of individuals, since as far back as the 1960s. Inglehart (1977) has argued that rising education levels and economic stability (considered as materialist values) of almost all individuals of economically better off societies have influenced their priorities to shift towards self expression, a sense of community and the quality of environment (considered as post-materialist values); and that post-materialists see political participation as a tool to change existing societal values from materialist towards post-materialist values, as against the materialists who are mainly focused on maintaining the status quo (Inglehart 1997). The political participation to change societal values is considered by some to be a social movement. In the second book of The Information Age trilogy, *The Power of Identity*, Castells goes on to define social movements as "purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society." (Castells 1997 : 3).

2.2 Social Movements

Social movements, especially ones which are detached from any political party or unions such as trade or labor unions, have been a regular feature of democracies in many parts of the world since the 1960s. Although their influence on society has been fluctuating in different periods of time, some forecasts that they would quickly disappear and everything will be back to business as usual, have proven to be wrong. In fact, the number of non-party or non-union related social movements have been increasing, and spreading to

new geographies as well. The social movements in the middle east which have gone on to result in the ouster of long time dictators in the last decade alone are a shining example of such increasing social movements.

Social movements are driven largely by the fundamental principles with which the participants identify. From this perspective, the values that the participants hold, drive their determination of goals and actions towards that goals. The values even motivate them to contribute to the costs of the actions. The stronger the belief of the participants in the values, the higher their contribution. Research on social movements has tried to understand the reasons for a new set of values to come into existence in any society. Della Porta and Diani (1999) have analyzed much research on this matter and one of their suggestions is a dual sided understanding of the topic. One side of it suggests that it happens because of the dis-integration of society, i.e., a large enough number of members of the society do not identify themselves with the values of the society and look for a new set of values. Whereas, the other side suggests the opposite, that it is the emergence of a tendency of social re-integration i.e., growth of new set of values without being concerned for the existing set of values (Della Porta and Diani 1999). The emergence of new political movements concerned with the environmental and gender issues are good examples of such re-integration tendency which are based on the emergence of new values.

According to what Inghelhart defines as 'scarcity hypothesis' (Inghelhart 1990 : 56) there is a hierarchy of needs, and only once the needs of lower order are met will the needs of a higher order be conceivable. Here, needs of a lower order mean the needs of physical survival such as physical security and economic freedom (materialist values), while needs of a higher order mean

intellectual and spiritual matters such as freedom of expression and political participation (post-materialist values). The hypothesis put forward by Inglehart has seen considerable debate, and the major argument against his hypothesis was that the post-materialist values he is talking about are not because of a major change in values but only a temporary phenomenon related to the specific historical period of the 1960s which resulted because of never before experienced levels of prosperity and easy access to higher education. However, the research Inglehart conducted over the 1970s and 1980s, including the periods of economic recession between 1973 – 1979, did not show any fall in the post-materialist values in the society. In fact, the number of individuals with post-materialist values has been increasing with each passing generation since then (Abramson and Inglehart 1995). This goes against the arguments that the rise of post-materialist values was only related to the period of 1960s. In addition, the levels of financial security although declining within USA and western European societies in the last couple of decades, including periods of economic recession, their lowest standard of living has seen a considerable increase over the past half century. This supports the argument that these societies have indeed seen a steady increase in their economic well-being throughout the last half century, which would go on to mean that the society in general was steadily moving from materialist to post-materialist values based on Inglehart's 'scarcity hypothesis'.

The emergence of post-materialist values has also been documented by a large number of surveys done in the USA and some European countries from the beginning of 1970s. The survey results show that the post-materialist values have been constantly rising among the citizens of these countries coming very close to the number of citizen's with materialist values, although the citizen's with materialist values are still the majority. Especially the younger citizen's

were seen as more sensitive to post-materialist values, and this measure has been constantly the same over two decades of the survey period (Inglehart 1990:75). The empirical evidence about changes in values has been used as the basis for analyzing the emergence of green parties and the characteristics of the supporters of such parties by a number of research works (Müller-Rommel 1989; Poguntke 1993; Dalton 1994; Steel et al. 1992). These value based analysis about the emergence of new political parties such as the Green parties and the characteristics of the supporters of such parties give support to the claim that those individuals who possess post-materialist values are more inclined to search for opportunities to support the emergence of new forms of collective action. The newness of these forms of collective actions compared to the traditional social movements is that they are witnessing an increased importance being placed on informationalism.

The emergence of new forms of collective action has indeed been visible in the social movements of the last decade. For any collective action, there has to be a similarity of values of individuals with others who all jointly agree on the importance of the values they hold. In a network society too this is important, although in the network society this action is based on Informationalism, i.e., the style, belief and attitude that almost everything in society is dependent on information technology. The social movements in Tunisia and Iceland were the first visible examples of such new forms of collective action, followed by the Indignadas of Spain and the Occupy Wall Street movements. Castells conducted an analysis of these social movements including some other prominent movements of the last decade such as the Tahrir square occupation in Egypt, presenting several of their common features (Castells 2012). As this research is based on similar kind of social movements, it will be very useful to take a closer look at some of the common features presented by Castells.

First among the common features presented by Castells is that these social movements are networked in several forms including not only the online and offline networks that are formed during the movement but also networks that existed before the movement ever came into existence. Networking technologies provide the platform for the continuing increase in the networking practice that keeps evolving with the changes in the social movements. Although the main networking happens in the physical space like a square or a plaza, their existence is on the free space of the online networks. As they exist not as a single network but as a network of networks, they do not have a physical center and still manage to coordinate the movement and keep up the deliberation. They do not need a command center and work on a decentralized network maximizing the chances of participation based on the interest and involvement of anyone interested in the topic without any boundaries or limitations. Without a center to control or destruct, the participants can keep on organizing themselves against any number of repressive actions as long as there are enough number of participants with the common goals and values.

Although these social movements generally start on the online social networks over the Internet, they actually turn into a movement by occupying a physical space such as a square or a plaza and demonstrating on this physical space. Castells calls this hybrid of online and offline spaces as the space of autonomy. "The space of autonomy is the new spatial form of networked social movements." (Castells 2012 : 222). This is the second common feature. The third common feature is that these social movements are both local and global at the same time. These movements start in a local setting for specific local reasons building their networks and occupying physical space in their locality to demonstrate. But at the same time, they are connected to the outside world

by learning from experiences of other movements and getting inspired by them. They also start and open a debate for the whole world to participate through the channels of the Internet summoning extra support in physical spaces of other parts of the world by calling for demonstrations in support of their own social movement. They mobilize such support on the claims of similarity of their local setting with similar examples all over the world raising the issue as a global issue to be taken seriously by the whole of humanity showing a sense of global consciousness.

The fourth feature is something which is consistent with all social movements till now, a timeless time. Timeless time is a hybrid of the present of the demonstrators and the future that the demonstrators are hoping for. In the physical places occupied by the demonstrators, they live each passing day without really knowing when they would be removed from there. They live there without really knowing how long they would be there in that occupied physical space, free from the discipline enforced by the activities of a regular day in their lives outside of the physical spaces of demonstrations. On the other hand, they refer in their arguments and debates to a way of life possible if the movement succeeds in bringing about the changes they hope from the movement. The fifth feature is that these movements originate spontaneously through the routes of the online networks, triggered by a spark of indignation aroused by a call to action from anyone who feels the same.

The sixth feature is that these movements are usually leaderless. This is more because of a lack of trust in the existing political system based on political representatives rather than a lack of aspiring leaders. There will be some more active members than others because of higher amounts of time they commit to the movement, but they gain acceptance only if they act with the broad

consensus of the present members highlighting the rule of self-government of the movement by its members than any single leader or committee. The goal is to bring in the foundations of a real democracy by practicing democracy in the movement. In all these movements' debates, the ineffectiveness of its participants' deliberation and of decision making are not negative features, but positive enablers which build the involvement of as many participants as present in deliberation and decision making. This deliberation highlights the reflectiveness of these social movements which is the seventh feature. The participants and the movement reflect not only in the physical spaces but also on online blogs and discussion forums about the movement, their participation in it, what they want to achieve and how, etc., including the experiences of the past movements to learn from their pitfalls.

Non-violence is the eighth major feature of these movements. The life or death of the movements is actually dependent on the non-violent feature of these movements because as soon as they take the course of violence they play into the hands of the politicians who will suppress the social movements' fundamental criticism aimed at the existing system, in the name of protecting society from the violence of the social movements. The situation in Syria is a good example of such a falling apart of a social movement. And the ninth and final feature that I would like to highlight is that these social movements are aimed at changing the values of the society as against having any specific demands. Because of this lack of demands, these movements are not able to focus on one project or goal, but this also makes it hard for any specific political party to benefit from the movements. They practice direct democracy based on deliberation, and networking of local and global communities using physical and virtual spaces, making them very political in nature. These movements express feelings and stir up debate with the aim of transforming the

state rather than seizing the state. "Indeed, when societies fail in managing their structural crises by the existing institutions, change can only take place out of the system by a transformation of power relations that starts in the people's minds and develops in the form of the networks built by the projects of new actors constituting themselves as the subjects of the new history in the making."(Castells 2012 : 228)

Castells concludes by saying that these social movements challenge the legitimacy of the political representatives because of their collaboration with the big corporations, which makes it hard for the existing institutions occupied by those political representatives to accept these social movements. The usual argument from the political representatives asking the public to use the next electoral opportunity for changing politics is objected to by most of these movements, in tune with most of the citizens everywhere in the world. These movements do not object to the principle of representative democracy, but the practice of such democracy based on elections which are powered by money and media instead of real interests of the individual citizens (Castells 2012 : 235). According to Castells, the battle for social change happens in the minds of the people, and in this matter these social movements have made considerable impact. He presents the results of an international poll of 23 countries conducted in November 2011, where people were generally in favor of Occupy and other similar movements and agreed with the criticism of the movements towards governments, politicians and financial institutions. "The actual goal of these movements is to raise awareness among citizens at large, to empower them through their participation in the movement in a wide deliberation about their lives and their country, and to trust their ability to make their own decisions in relation to the political class." (Castells 2012 : 236).

2.3 Web Movements:

The last decade has also seen the emergence of a different kind of social movements built on the combination of infrastructure of information technologies in the network society and the post-materialist values. Although these movements show most of the features that Castells has presented of the social movements in the information age, the one major difference of these movements is that they are started with an unlimited/permanent time frame of existence with a focus on continuous new causes that get attention of the individuals in the society. They form organizations to exist for a longer time, that are built on the same principles of focusing on increasing the deliberation and decision-making abilities of its participants by allowing them continuous opportunities to regularize their political participation beyond the electoral politics of the existing system. So, their aim is still the same as the social movements that we have mentioned above i.e., to bring into existence a world that they would like to live in, rather than trusting the existing system to work for them. These organizations are started out of the failure of the existing system to do their job and the lost trust of the citizens in the representative electoral politics as it is practiced today. Many organizations have been started on similar foundational principles all over the world. Most of these organizations act at the national level, although several of them act at local, regional and also at a global level. One of the organizations at the global level, Avaaz.org, describes itself as a web movement.

Based on the work processes of organizations such as Avaaz.org and Change.org, a web movement can be defined as a collective of individuals or groups who are using new technologies, such as the internet, to set their own

priorities based on frequent member polls and raise funds through voluntary donations from interested members in order to act on any issue of public concern in any part of the world with a core belief of global interdependence. The usage of internet allows them to be extra-ordinarily nimble, flexible, and focused. Internet is not just an instrument for them allowing them merely to act on their beliefs. It is the fundamental aspect which allows them to form a world view and their core belief of global interdependence.

These web movements are a type of social movements with a pragmatic form of goal orientation. Unlike the social movements that are presented above which have a flat hierarchy with no leaders and no specific demands, these web movements have specific demands and each demand is based on different acts of indignation suffered in different parts of the globe. Some of these web movements focus on local issues with local support, while some focus on issues at any level(local, national, regional or global) with support from any level. In this manner they connect many local issues with the global publics, and collect the values and expressions of the individual citizens in order to direct them at the elected representatives to demand them for acting on the desires of the individual citizens either from all over the world or just the citizens of their own jurisdiction or constitution.

In the USA, there is an active website from the White House, www.whitehouse.gov which is open for any American citizen to start a petition and the white house is obligated to give a response to any petition which is signed by 100,000 or more Americans in support of the petition. While this is one end of the basic usage of petitioning by a country's political system, the other end is the political system of the United Kingdom which has to debate the issue raised by a petition in the Parliament when a petition is supported by

10,000 or more UK citizen's signatures in its support. In Switzerland, any petition that can garner 100,000 or more signatures has to be put to a public referendum. In Switzerland, a referendum is a process where the issue is put out to a public vote where any registered adult member of the country's population can vote on the issue. The most recent referendum in Switzerland created a flutter world wide, highlighting a major issue of the present times. The referendum asked the Swiss electorate to vote on providing a Guaranteed Basic Income for all its citizens. The supports of the initiative suggested a sum of 2500 Swiss Francs (around \$2500) for all its adults and 625 Swiss Francs for each child. On the side of the social organizations which are not related to a country's administrative or official political machinery, many organizations send out petitions to individuals through emails and on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc., to garner support or raise funds for supporting the causes that they are concerned about.

While the above are examples of the traditional form of petitioning for raising support for a cause by standing in public places like parks, street corners, etc and collecting signatures from individuals now turning to the Internet for going online and reaching out to individuals through emails and on social media platforms on the Internet, there are new kinds of online platforms that have been started as a general tool for any individual to start any petition relating to any cause that they think needs to be addressed or supported in any manner. These new platforms are not concerned about any one specific issue or cause. They may or may not be open to start a petition by themselves. Instead, they aim to be an open platform available for any individual to start a petition of their own for supporting any cause that they feel is important and needs attention. Some of them have been started right from the beginning with such a format and have grown to become global organizations with millions of

individual members from all over the world. One example of such an organizations is Avaaz.org. On the other hand, there have been organizations which started out in support for a cause and then moved on to become an online petitioning platform based on the demands of its regular users. An example of one such organization is Change.org. While both these above mentioned examples of such online petitioning platforms are global in reach and have millions of members from many countries, there are many local, regional and national organizations as well which are founded on a similar ideology of disseminating information, and enhancing political debate and political participation. Couple of examples of such organizations are Kampact.de in Germany, Getup.org in Australia. USA is one of the countries with quite a few number of such organizations with Someofus.org, one.org, petitions.org, mothersagainstawar.org, friendsofearth.org, etc.

Most of these above mentioned platforms also have numerous ways of supporting the individuals who start a petition on their platform in gathering support for their petitions in order for them to achieve the stated goals of the petition. They are sent emails with tips to increase support for their petitions and also links to other websites with more information about creating successful petitions and online petitioning campaigns. When these online platforms see that a particular petition is getting good support and has the potential to become even bigger, they even send out the petition to their members with similar interests in order to enhance the reach of that particular petition. The criteria of each platform for providing such support varies from one to another. Below is a brief profile of couple of these platforms, Avaaz.org and Change.org, to better understand this phenomenon.

2.3.1 Avaaz.org:

Avaaz is one of the globally active organizations using online mechanisms and tools, especially online petitioning, to organize people on matters of social importance. The issues are not only the typical contemporary global governance issues which are widely discussed and debated, but hardly acted upon by any of its debaters; but also the issues that are taken up by Avaaz are more local in action and effects, while being global in nature and spirit. They pressure the present administrative and organization structure i.e., local / national authorities, to walk their talk, and come good on their solemn promises made in their own constitutions to their own society and public based on the support gathered by their members from all parts of the world.

"Avaaz is a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere." – *avaaz.org* (Avaaz, n.d.). As of today, its website claims more than 45 million members from 195 countries, with a core team on 6 continents campaigning in 15 languages. Its membership more than doubled in 2012 and also saw a similar doubling phenomenon in 2014. Avaaz has been growing at a steady pace till 2011, since its inception in 2007, and saw a sharp growth in membership in 2012 and 2014. Its main features as stated on its website are:

1. *From technology, new nimbleness and flexibility;*
2. *Priorities and power come from members;*
3. *Ethic of servant leadership;*
4. *Focus on tipping-point moments of crisis and opportunity;*
5. *Member-funded model makes it independent and accountable; and*
6. *Instead of fragmentation on issues, it grows-united by values.*

-- (Avaaz, n.d.)

Avaaz Membership Table:

Year	Membership	Increase in Membership
October 2007	1 Million	
April 2008	3 Million	2 Million
September 2009	4 Million	1 Million
April 2010	5 Million	2 Million
April 2011	8 Million	3 Million
May 2012	17 Million	9 Million
April 2013	20 Million	3 Million
July 2014	36 Million	16 Million

(Source: Self-created, using data available in 2014 on the webpage <http://www.avaaz.org/en/highlights.php>)

The uniqueness of Avaaz's work is regarding the nature of issues that are being pursued by it, its ability to gather the global support for such issues, the online structure of their campaign work, and the influence they claim they have on society due to the successful campaigns of Avaaz. The issues are generally local, which are initiated as a campaign by a local society member affected by or concerned about an issue. The Avaaz web platform provides tools with options for sending the campaign details around as emails, or on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. All campaigns created by members are generally supported with ideas to promote their campaigns. If the campaign earns the support at an increasing pace and gets highlighted by other media and society members, then the campaign gets additional support by the Avaaz team, who take up the campaign with a higher priority and attention. Once a

campaign idea has been selected, a tester email is sent around to 10,000 random members in a specific country. If the email gets more than 80% response, that email will be sent across to all the members in that specific country (Kingsley 2011). Avaaz encourages its members to participate, and includes in its campaign emails the links to send more emails – and messages on Facebook and Twitter – to people in responsible position in the government or international organizations, who have a duty to act. In this way, Avaaz helps to educate and encourage participation by individuals of the society from all parts of the world, and provides them with tools to communicate their collective opinion on an important social issue to the respective duty-bound official.

Here are three (3) of the cases claimed as victories in 2012 by Avaaz on its web-site's highlights page. These campaigns are highlighted here because they have a direct positive quote from a responsible authority / position holder, in-charge of taking action on the matter of the initiated campaigns. They are:

1. The biggest of their success stories in 2012 was relating to blocking the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) as their campaign was successful in collecting 2.8 Million signatures in support of their campaign, which were then handed over to the EU Parliament;
2. Freeing 100 trapped Indian laborers from the clutches of a Bahrain based construction company; and
3. Successfully initiating a stipend programme for 3 million children in Pakistan after the shooting incident of Pakistani Teenager Malala Yousafzai.

Although Avaaz does not have a formal, direct, and concrete proof about its

effects on the results achieved in the above issues, its fast increasing membership, global membership profile, and most importantly the acknowledgement of its efforts by people who are in influential positions in our existing governance structure, seems to provide it with some sort of proof of its activities' influence in our present system of decision making.

2.3.2 Change.org:

The origins of Change.org are placed in a bit more organic fashion of evolution than Avaaz, which started purely as a petitioning platform. Change.org was started in 2007 by Ben Rattray and Mark Dimas with the main goal of connecting its users to causes they are most interested in and making donations to them through a social networking platform idea. It is not a NGO like Avaaz. It is a for-profit company which used to collect 1 percent of all donations that pass through their website. It then evolved into an online network of blogs discussing social issues. In 2010, it became into an online petitioning platform due to the recognition of the increasing demand for such petitions among the visitors of their blog.

Calling itself "The world's platform for change", Change.org website claims that nearly every hour, a petition on Change.org achieves victory with 22,330 victories so far in 196 countries (Change.org). For them, signatures turn into victories. The website highlights that it is used by more than 100 million people in 196 countries creating change in their communities. Not just individual people but the website also says that "decision makers at the highest levels of government and business are engaging with their constituents and consumers."

(<https://www.change.org/about>). It also says that "more than 100,000 organizations are advancing their causes and connecting with new supports" and "Journalists are sourcing powerful stories and covering campaigns hundreds of times a day."(<https://www.change.org/about>)

In the USA, where Change.org is founded and is quite popular, Change.org is well known for bringing about a positive impact in the cases of Trayvon Martin, monthly 5 dollar fee of Bank of America, and helping Bettina Siegel to influence the U.S. Department of Agriculture in improving the food served to school children. As early as in 2010, a petition started in South African by a rape victim from one of the townships managed to make the South African Government acknowledge and act upon the cruel practice of "corrective rape" being used there as a "cure" for lesbians from their sexual orientation (Geron 2012). And in India, the country's Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Maneka Gandhi, responded to a petition on Change.org about changing the rules for issuing passports for children of single parents and forwarded it to the concerned Ministry of External Affairs to act upon the petition resulting in achieving the goal of the petition. She also appreciated all the individuals who signed the petition for supporting and bringing it to her notice.

Similar to Avaaz.org, although it is not easy to directly relate the results of the issues raised on Change.org to the petitions started on Change.org, responses of the decision makers like ministers in the government quoting the representation received in the form of an online petitioning campaign from Change.org as the reason for starting the process to reach the goal of the petition, and newspaper articles linking the petitions directly to the change of government proposals and policies makes the impact of such petitioning platforms very obvious in the

decision making process of our existing governance institutions.

2.3.3 Online Petitioning:

Petitioning as a political tool is one of the most traditional tools of political participation within democracies, especially the European and American democracies, but it lost its importance over the last century or two. From being a powerful tool of public participation in political decision making between the 13th to 18th centuries, petitioning became one of the least used political tools since the introduction of more direct tools such as referendum and as the political institutions gradually became more sectarian and complex (Bailey 1976). But, with the growth of *network societies* based on Internet and new-media there is an increasing interest shown by some governments (Miller 2008; Wright 2012; Ellison & Hardey 2013) and NGOs such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, etc., to re-use the petitioning tool through the Internet.

Although there are existing academic works relating to petitioning which studied petitioning as it was used in the 18th century (Bailey 1976), as a tool for understanding history (Voss 2001), within the European Parliament (Sommier 2011), or as used by the UK governments (Miller 2008; Wright 2012; Ellison & Hardey 2013), there has almost been no academic attention towards this kind of new online petitioning platforms which are started as places where people can start their own petitions, especially comparative studies using qualitative methods.

The specific reason that motivated the focus on online petitioning is the increase in the number of these new kind of online petitioning platforms that

are emerging, the significantly growing number of individuals signing online petitions on those platforms, and the increasing number of claims being made by such platforms about making a significant impact on the outcome of some of the important issues of the present day global society such as global warming, sometimes also backed by statements of eminent politicians, NGOs and civil society members that specific online petitioning platforms have played an important role in the outcomes of their programs, actions and decisions.

Another reason for the focus on these new online petitioning platforms, which raises normative questions regarding sovereignty and democratic functioning of modern democracies, is the uniqueness of such platforms in collecting global opinions and support, and allowing for directing such support to influence leaders and representatives at any level of democratic governance, be it local, regional, national or global, to act in the direction of such global public opinion. This reason gains significant importance in view of the falling electoral turnouts in many of the advanced democracies, the increasing levels of powerlessness that individual citizens feel over their ability to influence the political outcomes in their societies, and the increasing disconnect between what individual citizens are expressing as their choice and the decisions of their elected representatives. The increasing number of mass protests on the streets of many advanced democratic societies like USA, Germany, UK, France, Spain, and Italy against many of the decisions of their governments, and also the results of popular elections and referendums in the recent years are examples of such disconnect.

The above understanding of the web movements support the interpretation presented by Castells from his study of the major social movements of the last decade suggesting a general emphasis of these movements on increasing the

participation, deliberation and decision-making by the individual citizens all over the world. This pragmatic understanding resonates very closely to the concepts of 'Political Consciousness' and 'Organic Intellectuals' as presented by the Italian philosopher and activist Antonio Gramsci, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

3. Antonio Gramsci

3.1 Consciousness

3.2 Organic Intellectuals

3.3 Factory Councils

3.4 Web Movements & Factory Councils

3.5 Intellectuals and Organic Intellectuals

3. Antonio Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937) was an Italian philosopher who was active in the socialist and communist parties of Italy from 1913 till 1928 when he was sentenced to 20 years as a political prisoner. He spent most of his time in the prison writing down his thoughts in notebooks on diverse topics of his interest which were mainly theoretical and conceptual, responsible for much of his posthumous acclaim; compared to his writings before the prison sentence when his major contribution was to the newsletters of socialist and communist parties of Italy on the topics related to a specific controversy, event, or circumstance. Most of his writings became available to the English language readership only in 1971, much after his death in 1937, in the form of Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell's publication 'Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci' (1971). Since then, there has been a significant more studied, analyzed and written about Gramsci and his ideas in the English speaking world.

The main motivation for much of Gramsci's theoretical work has been about the knowledge which can mobilize political movements that have the power to bring about a radical transformation. This motivation of Gramsci originated

from his life's experiences in the socialist and communist parties of Italy where he was trying to build a grass roots based political party that could eventually lead to a global communist society, overthrowing the existing capitalist society. During his time in prison, he has written in detail about concepts such as 'intellectuals', 'common sense', 'consciousness', 'subalternity', 'hegemony', 'historical bloc', etc., in the process of understanding how a global communist society can be brought into existence. Among all the concepts that he has written about, the concept that has attracted the most attention by a large number of scholars has been the concept of 'hegemony'. All his other concepts are generally seen as a means towards explaining the above concept. This is understandable because 'hegemony' seems to provide a rational theoretical explanation of his understanding about mobilizing a political movement that can bring about a radical transformation.

While the number of articles and books studying and analyzing Gramsci's concepts and theories from many different perspectives have been continuously rising in various academic departments, a majority share of them are from the departments of education, sociology, political science, culture studies, and international relations. This project is based within the department of Global and Area Studies, and especially interested in the analysis of his concepts of 'consciousness' and 'organic intellectuals'. The special interest of this project in these two concepts is because of the opportunity they present to understand the foundational aspects of Gramsci's larger theoretical perspective. They help explain how individuals begin with the process of transformation which could ultimately lead towards a new hegemony.

As this project considers that a new hegemony is under creation, and is trying to understand the first steps that are being undertaken towards the creation of a

new hegemony, it is believed that the concepts of ‘consciousness’ and ‘organic intellectuals’ are the appropriate tools of the overall Gramscian framework that will be able to help explain the aspects being studied by this project. Herein lies the uniqueness of this project.

3.1 Consciousness:

Gramsci’s concept of ‘consciousness’ is strongly influenced by the Hegelian perspective towards understanding life. Just like Hegel tried to think about life, Gramsci tried to think about political action (Kiros 1985). In his book ‘Towards the construction of a theory of political action; Antonio Gramsci’ (1985), Teodros Kiros compares Gramsci’s conception of philosophy with Hegel’s, and presents Gramsci’s conception of philosophy as a particular type of political education with the help of which individuals come to understand their world as a rational structure. From that understanding, he claims that consciousness is a central aspect of political action for Gramsci. He bases this argument within Hegel’s intuitively appealing framework of the analysis of self-consciousness (Kiros 1985: 72). According to Kiros, this view helped Gramsci to examine philosophy in order to understand the importance of consciousness to political action i.e., conscious political action. “In the first part of *The Phenomenology*, Hegel attempted to answer how consciousness is generally obtained. It is this aspect of Hegel that is central to the understanding of Gramsci’s inquiry: how political consciousness is acquired” (Kiros 1985: 74). ‘*The Phenomenology*’ is the book written by Hegel published in the year 1807 which has Consciousness and Self-consciousness as its prime focus.

Gramsci believed that every one of us acquires a particular conception of the

world because of being born as part of a particular grouping where all the group members share the same mode of thinking and acting. "We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man." (Frogacs 2000:325). Consciousness is the self-understanding of one's own conception of the world which arises in individuals because of their basic common sense. Their common sense leads them to the realization of not only the building blocks of their conception of the world, but also helps them to use the building blocks to create their own individual conception of the world itself, which is different from the historically acquired conception of the world.

"The Gramscian statement that 'all men are philosophers' derived its inspiration from the human intellectual potentialities that Hegel unfolded...For Gramsci, to say that 'all men are philosophers' is another way of saying that all men are capable (have the potentiality) of becoming conscious" (Kiros 1985:79). Kiros explains that according to Gramsci, there are two kinds of philosophy, spontaneous philosophy and critical philosophy. Spontaneous philosophy is what is normally available to every individual which is visible in the general statements that we hear in everyday life. For example, "my philosophy in life is simple, live and let live", or "I am leaning towards the theory that the football match was fixed", etc. Gramsci based this spontaneous philosophy on common sense of individuals, which can turn into critical philosophy. "Therefore, in so far as men and women speak through the medium of language, rely on common sense, or utilize opinions extant in popular religions they are engaging in a particular form of philosophy – spontaneous philosophy – and are potentially authentic/critical philosophers. They are, however, potential philosophers only unconsciously. Here, Gramsci consistently followed Hegel in the sense that he too presupposes potentiality of consciousness. This potentiality of consciousness has yet to go through a series of developments, on its way to

becoming conscious practice, or critical philosophy. Again, it is apparent that these Gramscian formulations are firmly rooted in Hegel's analysis of consciousness" (Kiros 1985:80).

The spontaneous philosophy is the one that individuals inherit. *Within spontaneous philosophy, there is no process of examination in order to include or exclude any idea, belief or theory based on its merits. It can transform into critical philosophy only through the efforts of the individual.* "One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed" (Frogacs 2000:333). The consciousness arises when he critically analyzes this duality of conceptions because this duality is what leads to inaction. Only when the individual critically analyzes this duality, s/he begins to become conscious.

"But this 'verbal' conception is not without consequences. It attaches one to a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit any action, and decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. Critical understanding of the self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies', from opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. *Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and*

practice will finally be one." (Frogacs 2000:333)

Kiros argues that for Gramsci, critical thinking begins with the understanding of oneself by an individual as the end product of influences from all of history (Kiros 1985:82). So, spontaneous philosophy becomes critical philosophy when individuals ask themselves questions relating to their existence and status in their reality. "Is it better to 'think' without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and episodic way? In other words, is it better to take part in a conception of the world mechanically imposed by the external environment, i.e., by one of the many social groups into which everyone is automatically involved from the moment of his entry into the conscious world...or, on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world and thus, in connection with the labors of one's own brain, choose one's sphere of activity, take an active part in the creation of the history of the world" (Frogacs 2000)

The above Gramscian questions can be explained with a simple example: Every individual is born in an environment, an environment in which certain dominant beliefs, attitudes, superstitions, or religions are prevalent. So, the individual embraces the dominant elements of the environment, and develops an attitude over a period of his life time which constitute the individual's personality. In this manner, the individual engages a traditional philosophic activity, which is his spontaneous philosophy. This spontaneous philosophy will transition from this stage to the second stage, which is the critical philosophy, only if the individual questions his/her traditional conception of the world (Kiros 1985:82).

According to Kiros, Gramsci followed Hegel's structure of thought process

very closely but modified the subject of inquiry from Hegel's analysis of the "conceptual and historical structure of human experience in general, to discuss how the self develops and becomes an autonomous political personality" (Kiros 1985:83). While Hegel was focused on the absolute knowledge of object and subject dichotomy, Gramsci was focused on the transformation of politics based on the conscious political actions of the non-dominant group. "For example, by advocating the factory councils alongside with what he called 'organic intellectuals', Gramsci sought to directly bring critical philosophy or conscious practice to the led's everyday life. Through the factory councils in particular, he hoped that the led would govern themselves thoughtfully, critically and consciously. It is in this sense that Gramsci seems to have conceived of consciousness in general and philosophic consciousness in particular as capable of providing the led with the much needed virtue of political education" (Kiros 1985:83). The concept of 'organic intellectuals' here describes the individuals who have been able to convert their spontaneous philosophy into critical philosophy, and factory councils were suggested by Gramsci as the environment where this would happen. This concept of 'organic intellectuals' becomes the focus of our next section.

3.2 Organic Intellectuals:

The analysis of 'organic intellectuals' by Gramsci arises from his attempt to understand how new ideas come into prevalence in any society overcoming the resistance of the existing dominant ideas of the society, and who brings about this change. This dominance of a particular set of ideas in a society is explained by Gramsci using the concept of 'Hegemony' and the coming into existence of the domination of a new set of ideas over the old ones is explained

using the concept of 'Historical bloc'.

The concept of 'Hegemony' has been interpreted in a variety of ways by variety of scholars and activists. Every interpretation is dependent on the importance that a particular scholar attributes to Gramscian ideas for understanding politics and change. A reading of these variety of interpretations of Gramscian concept of 'Hegemony' helps us to come to an understanding: that any human in any part of the world can be influenced by ideas; and that these ideas are traditionally generated and distributed among humans by institutions such as religious organizations, educational organizations, leisure organizations, economic organizations, and political organizations.

For Gramsci, the above understanding was not attempted just to understand the situation, but with the specific purpose of changing the situation. It was an attempt to change the consciousness of individuals from following the ideas spread by institutions without any reflection, towards a situation where they would question and understand the origin and purpose of those ideas. 'Hegemony' as a concept is as such deeply oriented in the understanding of behavior with an intention of changing behavior.

Stephen Gill explains the relationship between the concepts of 'Hegemony' and 'Historical bloc' very well. "An historical bloc refers to an historical congruence between material forces, institutions and ideologies, or broadly, an alliance of different class forces politically organized around a set of hegemonic ideas that gave strategic direction and coherence to its constituent elements. Moreover, for a new historical bloc to emerge, its leaders must engage in conscious planned struggle. Any new historical bloc must have not only power within the civil society and economy, it also needs persuasive ideas, arguments and

initiatives that build on, catalyze and develop its political networks and organization – not political parties as such." (Gill 2002:58).

According to Gramsci, a particular group in society dominates other groups either through the coercive apparatus of the state, or through intellectual and moral leadership spread through the institutions of education, religion, and civil society. Femia quotes Gwyn Williams to explain this more clearly as, "an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society, in all its institutional and private manifestation, informing with its spirit all tastes, morality, customs, religions and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations" (Femia 1975:30). She goes on to explain Hegemony as, "the predominance obtained by consent rather than force of one class or group over other classes; and it is attained through the myriad ways in which the institutions of civil society operate to shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men perceive and evaluate problematic social reality." (Femia 1975: 31).

It is in gathering the above mentioned consent that Gramsci placed the role of intellectuals. They are the main actors in the spreading of the ideas of the dominant group among the masses and gaining acceptance for them. Their role remains the same even when a new class or group wants to gain dominance over the existing group. But the transformation process will not be immediate or sudden, because it will need the lengthy process of the transformation of the consciousness of the majority of the members of the society. It is the counter-hegemonic process which has to first undermine the existing hegemony in order to become the new hegemony.

Gramsci was of the belief that all men are intellectuals. He greatly extended the notion of intellectuals redefining it to include anyone who functions as an organizer, administrator, director, educator or leader of others in society. Explaining the difference between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, he says "although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist....There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought." (Frogacs 2000:321) By the term 'philosopher', Gramsci meant that, "all humans are philosophers to the precise extent that they think; thinking is distinctly human, and also the major component of philosophy" (Kiros 1985:84).

Gramsci differentiates intellectuals into two categories, traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. While traditional intellectuals refers to a category of intellectuals already in existence representing a historical continuity and special qualification based on their ability to understand and work on complex ideas of specific fields; by organic intellectuals Gramsci refers to intellectuals who come into existence naturally, undertaking an essential new function in any part of the society such as the economic, social and political fields. While an entrepreneur is an organic intellectual who has organized the confidence of employees, investors and customers; within the social and political field, individuals join civil society organizations, NGOs or political parties to attain and implement deliberative and organizational skills becoming organic

intellectuals (Frogacs 2000).

The importance that Gramsci places on organic intellectuals is immense, because for him, they are the foundation on which a truly democratic political system can be built. "Political participation and political education through organic intellectuals are two necessary conditions for the gradual establishment of a truly democratic political system" (Kiros 1985: 52).

Gramsci based his analysis of organic intellectuals especially on the ideas and beliefs that were generally held by individuals as common sense. For Gramsci, philosophical thinking was not something that is restricted to traditional intellectuals, rather philosophical thinking emerges out of the common sense of the common people trying to understand and solve the problems of their lives. "Common sense and critical philosophy are inseparable partners in that it is because of common sense that everyone is a potential philosopher." (Kiros 1985:267). The common sense leads the transformation of the conception of the world from the historically acquired conception to a self-acquired conception, based on the understanding of the world built on the reality experienced by the individual on a day to day basis.

Gramsci writes about the organic intellectual within the social and political fields in his prison notebooks as, "That all members of a political party should be regarded as intellectuals is an affirmation that can easily lend itself to mockery and caricature. But if one thinks about it nothing could be more exact. There are of course distinctions of level to be made. A party might have a greater or lesser proportion of members in the higher grades or in the lower, but this is not the point. What matters is the function, which is directive and organizational, i.e. educative, i.e. intellectual." (Frogacs 2000: 310)

As a way for creation of organic intellectuals, Gramsci highlights two main routes; one, the mass political party as the collective intellectual which trains its cadres in deliberative and organizational skills, and two, reformed schools which will bring a balance between manual and mental skills bringing down the separation between intellectuals and non-intellectuals. Especially relating to the situation in Italy where he was directly active, he suggested worker's democracy as a way of creating organic intellectuals through the establishment of factory councils within every factory. While the mass political party was the biggest and sophisticated form of the collective intellectual, the smallest and basic form of the collective intellectual which would train an individual to become an organic intellectual was the factory council.

3.3 Factory Councils:

The factory councils were simple groups including the workers in a factory. With different internal committees they would include all types of factory workers in a factory such as technicians, manual workers and clerical workers. While this was the basic format, through extension of factory council idea to ward councils it would also represent all employees of all kinds within a society by including all other worker categories such as waiters, sweepers, drivers, clerks, etc. The major focus on factory workers was because Gramsci lived during the peak of industrial revolution and this had a strong influence on his understanding of the society and its working classes. Gramsci considered the factory councils the foundation upon which the alternative worker's state could be built. But if he were to be alive today, it would be reasonable to assume that his focus would not have been concentrated on only factory workers anymore.

The general dominance of high and low skilled service sector would most probably be the major focus of his thoughts, as this sector has become the biggest employed group of society similar to the factory workers during the industrial revolution period.

For Gramsci, the factory council would prepare the ground for a worker's democracy, built on the democratic participation of the workers of the factories in the everyday decisions of the factories in order to understand how democracy works. Through everyday participation, the workers would learn the skills to organize themselves, understand the different group interests, and try to come to a decision agreeable to all the parties involved, inculcating a deep understanding of how democracy works. By inculcating such kind of thinking and deep understanding, workers would be able to understand the functioning of democracy even at a societal level. This transformation is based on the rising of the political consciousness of the workers because of the practice of democratic participation. From a situation where workers would be just sellers of their labor allowing the capitalists to exploit their labor, they become consciously aware of the value of their labor and how they can use their manual labor circumstances to enhance their intellectual abilities and political consciousness.

The above practice was initiated within the factory councils in the Italian city of Turin, which went on to occupy the factories and run them efficiently during the factory councils' movement of 1919-20 in Italy. The councils were in this way a form of direct democracy, different from trade unions in which only a restricted number of workers were active in different trade union positions while the majority of workers followed the union leaders in the form of a representative democracy. Although the movement failed, Gramsci was of the

view that the movement showed that the factory councils were successful in creating politically conscious organic intellectuals from within the working class. During the movement, the workers showed an excellent capacity for self-government of the mass of workers, producing the same or exceeding the pre-occupation levels of production quantity and quality with lesser resources, and showing a limitless capacity for initiative and problem solving ability overcoming successfully all the problems thrown at them during the movement (Frogacs 2000:108).

The establishment of factory councils was not with the intention of moving the economic and political power from the capitalist class to the workers. They were established to be the physical places where workers would be able to look again at the ideas that they own and critically question them to realize that the ideas are actually given to them through various institutions which they have accepted to be their own without critically questioning if these ideas are really in their personal interest or in the interest of someone else. Through this process, the factory councils could help the workers to think about their own ideas which would originate in themselves and would be in their personal interests.

“To conclude, for Gramsci, the function of the councils is not to make instantaneous revolution by smashing the state, as Lenin would have wanted. The purpose is cultural and political education that will gradually (through the internalization of critical philosophy) undermine the capitalist hegemony of the state and of ideas. Outside educators, such as professional revolutionaries, are ruled out. Rather, the revolutionary class must educate itself to the requirements of political life by developing new habits, attitudes, world views, systems of morality; in short, new culture, and form what Gramsci called as ‘historical

bloc’” (Kiros 1985:187). The concept of ‘historical bloc’ helped Gramsci to present the concept of ‘hegemony’, which is the most discussed idea of Gramsci.

In spite of such focus on individual improvement, Gramsci has been criticized for his conception of democratic centralism because he suggested the organic intellectuals to represent masses in the political organization of the society. Kiros has presented his ideas of what Gramsci might say against this criticism. According to Kiros, the role of organic intellectuals as representatives of the masses is a transitional role while the masses go through the process of learning towards becoming able to self-govern by becoming organic intellectuals themselves. As all individuals are potential intellectuals, they can think for themselves and will also be able to govern themselves. The Gramscian political party as such will be built along with the participatory self-governing institutions such as the factory councils, or in any other form or manner suitable for the particular place and time. The main aim of such a party would be to serve the dual purpose of representation during the transitional phase, and lead to the ultimate goal of self-government. (Kiros 1985:257).

Taking this above analysis into consideration, this project *argues that the web movements described in the previous chapter are similar to factory councils; and these web movements are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses to become organic intellectuals themselves.*

In other words, the above argument means that the emerging counter hegemonic idea is still in the early stages of striving to overthrow the existing hegemony and become the new hegemony. Here the emerging counter

hegemonic idea is that the existing governance structure is working in the interests of the few super rich and against the interests of the majority of the society; and the existing hegemony is that the existing governance structure, i.e., neo-liberal globalization, is working in the interests of the whole society and will eventually work towards the benefit of all sections of the society in spite of the existing negative effects of the ideology which are seen as temporary stages towards reaching its ultimate goal of working for the benefit of all sections of the society.

The emerging counter hegemonic idea is at a stage where it has acquired the cultural and ideological support from a large number of individuals of the society. It is now aiming towards turning the cultural and ideological support into a political project by objecting to the decisions taken by the elected representatives if the decisions do not seem to be in the best interests of a majority of the sections of the society or proposing new policies which will turn the governance towards the interests of a majority of sections of the society. Most of the mass street demonstrations, signing petitions, and writing letters to elected representatives that are gaining such huge attention from the individuals from different corners of the world are some of the examples of such political projects.

By the above argument, this project does not say that all the individuals within a society must and should participate in the web movements and become an active part of the self-governing society, although that would be a very much appreciated outcome. This project also recognizes the freedom of an individual to not participate in any kind of democratic processes and go on with one's individual goals leaving the governing to the elected representatives. But it highlights the emerging idea, that there are many a number of individuals all across the world, in all the world nations, who are interested in participating in

democratic processes beyond the traditional electoral voting of the representative political system limited to the national level; and that the web movements are presenting an opportunity for them to participate in democratic processes at the local, national, international or global level, allowing them to become organic intellectuals and bring a new hegemony into existence by becoming a new historical bloc.

The concept of 'consciousness' has helped us to understand the process through which individuals can transform their spontaneous philosophy into critical philosophy and become 'organic intellectuals'. We then learned how Gramsci proposed factory councils as the physical environment of the lived reality where the organic intellectual is born through political participation. The concept of 'organic intellectuals' then helped us to understand how it allows to bring into existence the concept of 'historical bloc' which further leads us to understand the concept of 'hegemony'. The chain of concepts that helps our understanding can be presented as:

Consciousness --> Organic Intellectuals --> Historical Bloc --> Hegemony

The importance of 'factory councils' in this overall scheme of concepts presented by Gramsci is immeasurable. Within the factory councils happens the actual participation by individuals helping them to become organic intellectuals who go on to become a collective historical bloc bringing about a new hegemony.

Based on the concepts discussed so far, which talk about the capabilities of

individuals to emancipate themselves given the freedom and opportunity (in the form of factory councils) to transform themselves into organic intellectuals who are capable of bringing about a new historical bloc, the above presented *argument is made that the web movements described in the previous chapter are similar to factory councils; and are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals themselves.* This hypothesis will be empirically tested based on the data collected through interviews.

For testing the above argument then, we will need to examine whether web movements are similar to factory councils, and whether some organic intellectuals are representing the masses and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals. This research proceeds to check if the web movements are similar to factory councils based on four of the main features of factory councils i.e., *individual participation, geographical inclusion, deliberation, and social organization.*

3.4 Web Movements & Factory Councils:

Factory councils mandated individual participation of each and every worker in all the decisions of their respective work. It was not optional. The web movements on the other hand do not mandate, they contribute to the feature of individual participation by allowing any individual who has already realized a self-acquired conception of the world or who is still in the process of realization of a self-acquired conception of the world, to invite other individuals to participate in the web movements. The individuals participating in these

movements are at different levels of consciousness and hence have different levels of understanding of the hegemonic forces in action. The actions of these web movements are mainly aimed at raising the chances of individuals becoming organic intellectuals through regular participation in the web movement's activities.

A politically conscious organic intellectual is able to realize that for improving the situation, an individual has to spread his/her conception to other members of the society to make it into the dominant conception of the society. It is only through such a situation do they have a chance to improve their present situation of their exploitation by the dominant class. "Gramsci stated further that a contact between the philosophers who are at the level of 'criticism' and those who are at the level of 'spontaneity' was desperately needed. Only by this does life itself become intelligible and comprehensible by all thoughtful and politically and philosophically conscious individuals" (Kiros 1985:90).

While factory councils were built purely with the factory workers in mind, they were supposed to expand in the form of ward councils which would include all other members of the society contributing to the feature of geographical inclusion. The intention was to include everyone in the society to be able to participate and learn the skills needed to become an organic intellectual. The idea was that they would start from their local region and spread to the rest of the country, and even beyond the national borders after successfully covering the whole of Italy. In a similar manner, the virtual feature of the web movements allows individuals from all over the world to become a part of the web movements, connecting them to issues in all parts of the world. This provides the possibility for any individual who might have hitherto not been able to begin his transformation into an organic intellectual because of his local situation or circumstances, to participate in the transformation process. This

whole process contributes to the possibility of growth in the number of organic intellectuals at a very fast pace, which was unthinkable at any point of time in the history of humankind.

While the councils aimed at gradual geographical expansion, web movements make it possible to participate in their processes instantaneously in all geographical locations of the world wherever the infrastructure is available for accessing the internet. In this manner, the web movements are expanding their inclusionary capabilities at a speed and range that the factory councils could not even imagine. But the principle is similar, as the ideas of factory councils was supposed to grow from Italy and spread all over the world. The web movements are also similar with a goal of universal coverage with no specific geographical boundaries, allowing anyone interested to participate in the movement.

Another feature of the factory councils was to encourage deliberation among the members on all the items on its agenda. The idea of the councils was that by mandating participation, they would be encouraged to become active participants by considering and expressing new perspectives into the debate and discussion contributing to the enhancement of all the participating member's understanding of the topic. Opposing perspectives from different members would allow the members to know the pros and cons from different perspectives before deciding and voting in favor of one perspective over the others. Web movements are essentially demanding the same from the participants by presenting a topic from one perspective and giving information about the same from different other sources supporting their perspective. Although, it does not request the participants to search for other perspectives before deciding to support any particular act on an issue, by just requesting to support an issue it asks the individual to decide about the topic. Whether the individual chooses to support or ignore the call for action, he or she would have

to think about all their existing knowledge about the issue.

Another major feature of the factory councils was to inculcate social organization among the members of the councils. The councils were seen as the basic units which would help organize the whole society into a grand union of individual members comprising of organic intellectuals, and also individuals in the process of becoming organic intellectuals. By organizing socially at the factory and ward council levels, individuals will realize the power of numbers, which would help them to become a historical bloc in order to achieve their goals of bringing a new hegemony in to existence. In a similar fashion, web movements contribute to social organization by allowing any individual to raise an issue and ask support from fellow individuals pushing them to think about the issues and make a decision either to support or ignore it.

Depending on the topic, such social organization can be local, regional, national or even global. In this aspect, web movements are at a much stronger level of contribution to the factor of social organization compared to the factory councils. While factory councils were focused on units within the factories, and ward councils were focused on geographical units at the ward level, it was a process of slowly spreading to different geographical regions one after another. It would also mean that wherever there were no form of councils, individuals interested in participating would have to wait until a council came into existence. Whereas web movements made it possible for any individual from any corner of the world to raise an issue and request support from any individual in any corner of the world, or request support for issues raised by even other individuals without any dependency on local factors.

3.5 Intellectuals and Organic Intellectuals

The other aspect of the theoretical argument is to examine if some intellectuals are representing the masses, and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals. This can be achieved by examining whether some of the individuals participating in the web movements are questioning the reality they have been given historically from their inherited environment and criticizing its shortcomings. If they are even getting the noticed shortcomings to the attention of the existing system and demanding that corrective measures be implemented, it proves beyond doubt that the participants are indeed on the right path towards becoming organic intellectuals. The important aspect here is not that the individuals are just signing a petition, but that they realize that the existing situation is because of the existing governance structure which is following the existing hegemonic ideas, and that they are criticizing it and trying to change the existing structure through a political project based on the culture and ideology of a new counter-hegemonic idea. Although the participants themselves may not be able to realize or express this change in their ideology in conceptual terms like hegemony or historical bloc, they should be participating in activities which suggest such a change.

The most important aspect of helping an individual towards becoming an organic individual is if the individual is able to transform his/her philosophy, i.e from spontaneous philosophy to critical philosophy, which helps him/her to become an organic intellectual. By participating in the discussion and learning the opposing opinions about issues, individuals learn that politics at a societal level is the playing field where different competing groups are constantly trying to make decisions that are in their favor. They learn to find the best possible solution that might be agreeable to all the parties involved. Even when the best

possible solution is not reached, through this process they understand how politics works. Such understanding of politics allows the individual participants to realize the various different groups working towards directing the society in various different directions of their particular interests and preferences, and which group or groups are able to dominate others in the whole process making their group interests to reign above the interests of the other groups. While all the matters in factory councils had a direct effect on the factory workers, for the participants of web movements it may or may not be the case as anyone is allowed to take part in any issue. But the point of gaining political education is successfully achieved in the process.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion:

Now that the theoretical argument is made, let us check whether the data collected from the interviews supports the arguments made. As discussed in the previous chapter, the web movements concept used in this research is based on the online petitioning platforms and its participants, and the data is collected from the participants of online petitioning platforms. In regards to the first part of the argument relating to the comparison of web movements with factory councils, we would have to check if the responses from the interview participants help us get an insight on the topics of *individual participation, geographical inclusion, deliberation, and social organization*.

The immediate step within the process followed by most of the online petitioning platforms after individual participants have completed signing an online petition, is to request them to share with others the online petition they just supported, in order to increase the support to the petition they signed and reach closer to achieving the goal of the petition that they have just supported. The petitioning platforms present the petition supporters with multiple options for sharing the petition and requesting others to join them in achieving the goal of the petition. The options to share vary from an easy link to share the petition on social media websites like facebook and twitter, along with an option to send the petition as an email, and an easy to copy link to be able to share it on any other digital platform like skype or instant messaging. The fact that these petitions are able to amass hundreds of thousands of signatures within days of starting a petition, or sometimes even within hours itself, is a big sign of how efficient these online petitioning platforms are in including individual participants in the process of petitioning.

From the responses of the interviews done as part of this research, it becomes clear that 60% (46 out of 76) of the participants signing an online petition go on to further share the petition on their public profile page or as personal messages to their friends who might be interested in the topic of the petition, on social media websites such as facebook and whatsapp. It also becomes obvious to us that the aspect of inviting new individuals to participate in these web movements is very efficient when we look at the answer relating to another question of this research i.e., how they got to know about these online petitioning platforms themselves in the first place. Around 30% (23 out of 76) of the interview participants responded that they found out about the online petitions and online petitioning platforms for the first time when someone that they know personally, such as a friend or a family member, forwarded it to them on social media websites or through email.

The questions which were put to the interview participants that lead us for getting to the above presented conclusion are as follows:

1. After signing a petition, these online petitioning platforms ask you to share the petitions on Facebook, Twitter, or email. Do you share the petitions using these formats?

If yes, (follow on question) which ones?

2. How did you come to know about this online petitioning platform (eg. Avaaz.org or Change.org or etc.,)?

Although the petitions are mostly shared by a known friend or family member, it does not mean that the petitions are limited to any local geographical

boundaries. In response to another question of the interview relating to the geographical origin of the petitions they signed, in around 47% of cases (36 out of 76), the individual participants of these petitioning platforms replied that they do not give much importance to the geographical origin of the petitions. Also, in most of the cases where the participants reply that they have never signed any petition relating to other countries, they highlighted the fact that it is only because they have never received or seen any petition relating to any other country other than the country of their residence. They also highlighted that if they would have received or seen the petitions relating to other countries, they would have gone ahead to learn the details relating to the petition and then decide whether they would participate in the petition or not, just like they do for the petitions that they have already received or seen.

So, the only reason they had not participated in petitions relating to other countries was that they were never presented, or they have never seen a petition relating to other countries. For a majority of the total interview participants, their responses make it abundantly clear that their decision to support a petition or ignore a petition are related to the importance of the topic or issue being dealt with by the petition rather than their geographical origin. Geographical boundaries were especially suggested by the interview participants as a topic that would not have any significance in choosing to support or ignore a petition that they would receive or see. The fact that these petitions are being shared on the internet removes any geographical barriers to receiving the petitions, and the lack of importance given to the geographical origin of the petitions in the responses of the interview participants suggests the vast extent to which these web movements are able to spread the geographical inclusion of individuals within their ambit.

The above idea was very clearly articulated by the interview participants from all the four countries where the interviews were conducted in response to the below question:

Did you sign any petition relating to any country other than (country of residence)?

For yes or no, (follow on question) Why?

If yes, (another follow on question) do you give more importance to petitions from (country/continent of the interview participant) compared to petitions relating to other countries/regions?

From the interview responses, it is also clear that when an individual receives a petition relating to a topic, the first response is to think about their own personal understanding of the topic. As soon as the participants see a petition, they try to analyze if they already know any information about the topic, and if not, then if they find the topic interesting enough to learn about it. In most of the cases, the participants make a decision to either support or ignore a petition within a time range of few seconds to few minutes. In cases where they are already aware of the topic of the petition and the main perspectives going around in the public discussion about the topic, the decision to support or ignore is almost instantaneous.

In cases where they have seen the topic floating around but are not aware of the details, they generally decide if they would like to know more. In case of a positive response, they go on to learn more about the topic by reading the petition and all the details it presents. If they do not find the information given by the petitioning platform to their satisfaction, they even go on to read other

links provided by the petition itself, in addition to their own personal research about the topic. Their personal research happens most of the times on the internet using search engines like google to find appropriate articles on other websites, ranging from websites of big news media organizations to webpages of individual bloggers presenting their personal views about the topic on different blogging platforms. In these cases, where they conduct their personal research, the individual participants usually spend around 10-15 minutes. Only in rare cases, did the participants suggested to have spent more than an hour of personal research time on the topic.

The deliberation happens among the petitioning platform participants not only in the form of above mentioned online research, but also in the form of discussion by the individual petition participants with their friends and family members about the topic of the petitions that they signed and supported. Out of the 59% (45 out of 76) of the total interview participants who replied that they indeed discussed about the petition they signed with other, friends are the top group of individuals with whom most participants share about the petitions they signed, followed on by family members. Colleagues also form part of such discussion, but to a much smaller percentage compared to friends and family members.

The above responses were given by the interview participants for the below interview questions:

1. Do you sign all the petitions that you see from the (online petitioning platform) or choose to sign some and ignore some?

If yes, (follow on question) what is the basis of deciding which one to choose and which one to ignore?

2. Do you spend any time understanding the issue before you sign a petition?

If yes, (follow on question) how much?

3. Do you also do some personal research about the issue before signing a petition other than the information given by the (online petitioning platform)?

If yes, (follow on question) what kind of research? And where do you look for more information?

4. Do you discuss the petitions you signed with any of your contacts like friends, family, co-workers, etc?

All the above presented interpretations of the data collected, from the responses of the interviews conducted as part of this research project, highlight the high contribution made by online petitioning platforms in the matter of social organization in our society. If this was not conclusive enough proof of the contribution by these platforms towards social organization, then the responses of the interview participants to another interview question kills any such doubt. A little more than 89% of all interview participants from all the four countries (Brazil, Germany, India and USA) in which this research was conducted answered that our society needs organizations such as these online petitioning platforms like Avaaz.org, Change.org, etc., because of their contribution towards spreading awareness about many important topics and allowing individuals to participate in taking some action on those topics.

Many of the interview participants suggested that they did not know about

many of the topics that came to their attention through these online petitioning platform, and as such they brought new topics into their conscious. They also suggested that if not for these online petitioning platforms they would have neither know about these topics, nor did anything to improve the situation presented in the petitions. Even in cases where the interview participants were aware of the topic, they did not know how they could do anything to act on the issue or topic raised on the online petitioning platforms. As such, these platforms gave them a chance to not only know about new topics and issues, but also help them to support other individuals who were already trying to improve the situation, or even offer them the opportunity to start a new petition if they really felt strongly to act upon any topic of their interest.

In around 35% of the cases (27 out of 76 interviews), the interview participants even responded that they started to read more about political and social issues and become more interested in political participation after starting to actively participating on the online petitioning platforms. Out of around these 35% cases, around 60% (17 out of 27) of the interview participants were not even an active member of any kind of NGOs or social movements in their life before coming to know about these online petitioning platforms. So, these platforms played an important and invaluable part in bringing these individuals closer towards becoming an active participant of social organization.

The above responses were given by the interview participants as a response to the below question:

1. Do you think our society needs organizations like Avaaz?

If yes, (follow on question) then why?

(If no answer, clarify with below question)

** Do you think Avaaz is contributing to democracy or governance?*

If yes, (follow on question) then how?

2. Did you start reading about or participating in any other form of political issues, or started doing it more actively, after starting to sign (online petitioning platform) petitions?

If yes, (follow on question) do you think signing (online petitioning platform) petitions increased your interest in social / political issues?

3. Were you part of any NGOs or social movements or protests before signing your first (online petitioning platform) petition?

If yes, (follow on question) which NGOs or movements or protests and in what manner? I mean signing petitions or giving money or joining demonstrations, etc?

4. If (online petitioning platform) did not exist, would you have been as active in social issues as you are now?

If no, (follow on question) why not?

If yes, (follow on question) how would you have been active? What would you be doing? Which organizations or teams would you have joined?

The above presented research findings help us to establish that in aspects of the similarities highlighted, web movements are indeed similar to factory councils.

The other half of the two pronged theoretical argument presented in this research is to examine if some intellectuals are representing the masses, and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals. The first part of this can be undertaken by identifying the individuals representing the masses and examining if they are intellectuals, and the second part can be achieved by examining whether some of the individuals participating in the web movements are questioning the reality they have been given historically from their inherited environment and criticizing its shortcomings.

As presented in the earlier section of this chapter which focused on the discussion about intellectuals, there are two kinds of intellectuals according to Gramsci, traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. While the intellectuals already existing in a society who have expertise in specific fields were considered as traditional intellectuals, individuals who take on new functions that are required in different aspects of a society in the process of its gradual evolution, such as the economic, social and political fields, were considered as organic intellectuals. To repeat another point made earlier, while an entrepreneur is an organic intellectual who has organized the confidence of employees, investors and customers; within the social and political field, individuals join civil society organizations, NGOs or political parties to attain and implement deliberative and organizational skills becoming organic intellectuals (Frogacs 2000).

The intellectuals who are representing the masses could be either from the group of traditional intellectuals or from the group of organic intellectuals. The two major online petitioning platforms, i.e., Avaaz.org and Change.org, that

were most often used by many of the interview participants were started by individuals who would clearly fall in the category of organic intellectuals. We can confirm this by observing the fact that the founders of both the platforms, Ricken Patel, the founder of Avaaz.org and Ben Rattray, the founder of Change.org, noticed the deficiencies in the existing system and tried to fill that gap by creating new tools that they felt were much needed to perform certain important tasks within our society. While Avaaz.org was initiated with a political motivation, Change.org was started with an economic motivation. Irrespective of such different motivations, both of the platforms are performing a very similar role within our society. The fact that these tools are gaining so much attention and participation from the individuals of our societies confirms that there is indeed a gap which these two platforms are fulfilling in the existing system. By creating such new tools which are fulfilling an important need that arose due to the specific circumstances of the times, these two individuals present a very good example of organic intellectuals.

While Avaaz.org defines itself as a "global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere" (<https://avaaz.org/page/en/about/>), Change.org defines itself as the world's platform for change where "people everywhere are starting campaigns, mobilizing supporters and working with decision makers to drive solutions"(<https://www.change.org/about>). The common focus of both these platforms is multifaceted. One is on geographical inclusion based on the terms used in their self definition such as "global" and "everywhere", second is on people based on the word "people", and third is on politics based on the words "politics", "starting campaigns", "mobilizing supporters", "decision-making" and "decision makers". It is clear from their definitions that they are focused on

bringing individual members of the society from all parts of the world to become active in social decisions through political projects. This helps us to categorize the organic intellectuals leading these organization within the social and political categories of intellectuals, and their focus on bringing more people to participate in social decisions helps us to highlight their intention towards what this research project recognizes as the goal of philosophical transformation of the masses i.e., the aim of transforming the perspective of the individuals within the masses from spontaneous philosophy to critical philosophy.

It is important to realize that such transformation of philosophy is not a sudden occurrence. It is also something that is not possible to be achieved at a superficial level. It is a complex, deep and long process of realization by the individuals of their self-understanding of their world views and how such understanding is impacted by different perspectives. Individuals who participate in the online petitions either participate because they have already reached the stage of critical philosophy, where some of them have even become organic intellectuals themselves, or individuals who are introduced to the whole process of transformation starting right from the aspect of questioning their spontaneous philosophy.

One of the clearest signs of the influence these online petitioning platforms have on the latter of the above two groups of individuals who participate on these platforms is that while around 29% (22 out of 76) of individuals who participated in the interviews replied that they would have not even started participating in any kind of political or social issues if not for the existence of these online petitioning platforms, around 35% (27 out of 76) of interview

participants replied that participating in these petitions on these online petitioning platforms has had the influence of encouraging them to read more about other political and social issues. The rest of the individuals in both the above statistical groups are either already active in some or the other forms of action in political and social issues, or are already aware of the different perspectives on many political and social issues. This puts them much ahead in the transformation process from spontaneous to critical philosophy or in the group of organic intellectuals doing their bit in bringing about a new hegemony into existence.

The above responses were given by the interview participants as a response to the below question:

1. Did you start reading about or participating in any other form of political issues, or started doing it more actively, after starting to sign (online petitioning platform) petitions?

If yes, (follow on question) do you think signing (online petitioning platform) petitions increased your interest in social / political issues?

2. If (online petitioning platform) did not exist, would you have been as active in social issues as you are now?

If no, (follow on question) why not?

If yes, (follow on question) how would you have been active? What would you be doing? Which organizations or teams would you have joined?

The above actions of participating for the first time in such political and social

actions, or starting to read more and become active in the discussion on political and social actions are only the starting steps towards becoming an organic individual. As presented earlier in the theoretical discussion on this topic, for Gramsci, the philosophy of an individual is based on their consciousness. "Critical understanding of the self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies', from opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one." (Frogacs 2000:333)

The actual transformation happens when the participants become conscious of the realization that their participation is motivated by the actions of the existing governance structure in a direction that goes against the general welfare of the society. They become conscious that they are demanding something that they feel is in the best interests of the society as against what the existing system is actually undertaking in the name of the best interests of the society. Most of the replies given to one particular interview question help us to conclude that the participants are supporting a particular action on a specific issue or cause in which they felt the existing governance structure is not working in the best interests of the society. They were supporting a demand to either stop some actions being taken, or initiate some action in relation to a particular topic. The question was inquiring the reason for signing a petition, in the below format :

What was the reason behind signing the petitions?

Some of the responses for the above question were:

"To voice public opinion against injustice from all sources, even government.",

"To participate and contribute in what I believe.",

"I felt it as a responsibility to sign." ,

"To change something and support people trying to change something."

"They were legitimate and required attention. "

"To bring a change."

"To help the cause and bring some change. "

Although the exact words used by the participants were different, their main intention was to support what the petition was demanding from a specific authority or position to act in a certain manner on a particular issue on which the existing governance structure was proceeding with a different action which the participants felt was wrong and should be stopped or modified. Every single interview participant who signed a petition on any of the online petitioning platform has done so with the above intention. They agreed with the demands of the petitions and wanted to support the individuals or organization who were making the demands. The above explanation suggests that the participants are able to realize that the actions being taken by the individuals in positions of authority within the existing governance structure are doing so not in the best interests of the society and that needs to be changed. This realization is possible only once the individuals have started to realize their inherited political consciousness and began its critical questioning.

By this critical questioning they are able to realize that the existing governance structure is working not in the interests of the majority of the society. The

increasing number of individuals participating in the above platforms, which has already reached a significant number of individuals counting in the hundreds of millions, suggests that emerging counter hegemonic idea is at a stage where it has acquired the cultural and ideological support from a large number of individuals of the society, and is now aiming towards turning the cultural and ideological support into a political project by objecting to the decisions taken by the elected representatives or bureaucrats, if the decisions do not seem to be in the best interests of a majority of the sections of the society or proposing new policies which will turn the governance towards the interests of a majority of sections of the society.

In summary, the above discussion along with most of the data presented as evidence of the similarities between factory councils and the web movements help us to conclude that these web movements are indeed not only introducing individuals from within the masses to new political and social topics and raising their interest and activity in political education and participation, but also enabling their ability to learn, discuss, deliberate, share, and organize, which are the steps needed for an individual to move from the stage of spontaneous philosophy to critical philosophy and become an organic intellectual. This allows us to conclude that the second part of the argument made in this research project that some intellectuals are representing the masses, and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals, is indeed true. Hence, the overall *argument that the web movements described in the previous chapter are similar to factory councils; and are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals themselves, is validated.*

As this project is focusing specifically on studying online petitioning platforms for its data collection, the project also examines couple of main aspects of the online environment in relation to a global web movement. One is relating to the major criticisms of online political participation such as 'Digital Divide', 'clicktivism', and 'Simplification', while the second is relating to the dilution of the concept of 'Sovereignty' that is being highlighted by the participation of individuals from all over the world irrespective of their nationalities in issues that are relating to other sovereign nations. These two aspects become the focus of the next chapter.

5. Criticisms

5.1 Digital Divide

5.2 Clicktivism

5.3 Simplification

5.4 Sovereignty

5. Criticisms

New forms of participation in political matters through internet based tools are changing the manner in which individuals view and engage with democracy. This new development based on the proliferation of digital technology in political matters is attracting young scholars from various academic disciplines, especially from the political sciences and political communication departments. These scholars have brought into existence a new perspective to look at the relationship between digital technology and politics, which has allowed them to strongly argue against the existing derogatory attitude of the conventional scholars towards the usage of internet based tools for political participation. Connective action, as against the traditional importance given to collective action, has emerged from the new scholars as a central concept for theoretical and empirical research in the study of political participation in a digital environment (Bennett & Segerberg 2012).

Connective action, as against the familiar concept of collective action, has been proposed by Bennett and Segerberg (2012) to help understand the structural fragmentation and individualization of political participation that has been happening in the internet era. The traditionally strong identification with singular ideologies and massive political party memberships of individuals in

various industrialized economies have seen a gradual reduction in their numbers in the last couple of decades, especially among the younger individuals. Inglehart (1997) was one of the earliest scholars to observe these changes in detail highlighting the interests of these young individuals to reflect their new attitudes through their political engagement. Although the topics of engagement might be same as in the past, such as human or women's rights, the processes of participation are increasingly transforming towards individual acts in comparison to action as part of a group or ideology. Such individualization resulting in an interest to give their support for causes without subscribing to a specific group identity has implications for collective action. It has resulted in individuals increasingly using a personal frame of reference which is easy to share in a digital environment.

The concept of connective action is in line with other concepts that have been gaining ground in order to study the changes happening in political participation in the internet era. Everyday makers (Bang 2005, 2010) and information activism (Halupka 2016) are couple of good examples of such other similar concepts. All these new concepts are based on the idea that the traditional concepts of political participation, as a process of conflict between different view points or group interests in order to arrive at a common ground and reach a consensus, are unable to help us understand the contemporary methods of political participation by individuals focusing on personalization and individualization of political matters. They bring a breath of fresh air into the academic literature which has been mostly critical of political participation happening on the internet (Sunstein 2001; Hindman 2009; Morozov 2009; Pariser 2010).

The criticisms of the conventional scholars has been based on their perspective

of analyzing connective action through the lens used for studying collective action (Sunstein 2001; Hindman 2009; Pariser 2010). For them, connective action is at best a tool to be used by collective action actors for achieving their goals. They were also criticizing the early enthusiastic research on the potential of internet for reshaping democracy based on the normative values of direct democracy and public sphere. They were criticizing the claims that internet offered a solution for removing the shortcomings of traditional democratic institutions and give power back to the people (Sunstein 2001; Hindman 2009; Pariser 2010). Some of the most visible and loud criticisms they aired are relating to the aspects of digital divide (Garnham 1997; Jung et al. 2001) and clicktivism (Putnam 2000; Shulman 2009; White 2010; Gladwell 2010). There are couple of other criticisms that did not receive as much attention as the above two, but are nonetheless equally important. One is relating to the simplification of the issue in an attempt to present the topic in a single email or webpage, and the other is relating to the aspect of sovereignty. The latter among these criticisms is a new aspect which is related specifically to the petitions that are targeted at issues in a specific geographical region or group and collecting signatures from all over the world. Below is a detail discussion of each of the above topics.

5.1 Digital Divide

The topic of digital divide is one of the foremost criticisms that have been aired about political participation through the new information and communication technologies. It originated from the wider theme of social inclusion. The political discussion over the access of information and communication technologies and its potential to either improve or worsen social inclusion

received much interest from all sections of the society, especially in the industrialized countries such as the US and the UK. The concepts such as 'networked societies' and 'knowledge economies' have received much attention for their transformative potential not only of individuals but also of whole societies (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998). The politicians of these industrialized countries have gone to the extent of claiming that the ability to use such technologies is a fundamental aspect of citizenship (Wills 1999: 10).

Arguments have been made that these technologies have the ability to empower individuals and improve their civic involvement (Katz et al. 2001). So, it is argued that people who do not have access, or are not able to use these technologies will fall behind in these networked societies. Concerns have been raised in the public and political debates over such lack of access or inabilities for the individuals of such industrialized countries (Hansard 1997; Thomas 1996). Concepts of 'information haves' and 'information have-nots' (Wresch 1996) became popular describing the people who are either connected or not connected to new technologies and the information and knowledge it brings. So, the first definitions of digital divide were more or less a simple matter of access to these new technologies. With further research, the definitions evolved to go beyond the physical access to technologies towards including the skills and knowledge necessary to actually engage with these technologies in order to effectively achieve the goals of their users (Dijk 1999).

For the critics of connective action, digital divide would mean that the political participation happening through the internet included only the individuals who had access to these new technologies, or individuals who had the skills and knowledge necessary to actually engage with them in order to achieve their goals. This would mean that their participation is not representative of the

whole society. So, looking from just the global number of individuals who do not have access to internet as of yet, there is a huge percentage of the global population which is not represented in the political participation happening through the internet, even though that number is constantly decreasing at a tremendous pace in the last few years. So, it would only be a matter of time before every individual all over the world will have access.

The above kind of technological determinism has been criticized, as individuals' ability to engage with these technologies is based on a complex mix of social, psychological, economic, and pragmatic reasons, and not just on mere access or even ability of the individuals to use these technologies (Garnham 1997; Jung et al. 2001). Although the numbers are not as easily available, if we include the number of individuals who are actually able to 'engage' with internet for political matters as of today, the representation in political matters which are in general applicable to the whole society becomes even more skewed.

Looking from a comparative perspective though, these criticisms start to look a lot less valid. If we look at our present system of democratic institutions, they are fundamentally representative in nature. We elect a representative to take decisions on our behalf through the process of elections. We also have to remember that the required eligibility to run for any elected position has been deliberately kept to the minimum in order to keep the option open for any ordinary citizen to be able to contest in elections. In most of the cases today, there are hardly any experts of subject matter who contest elections, leave aside win elections (Feld & Kirchgässner 2000; Budge 2006). They are mostly career politicians, who have mastered the art of winning elections. A single elected representative is generally entrusted to make decisions for a very large number

of individuals, and a very small number of such elected representatives for whole nations.

The total number of elected representatives in the majority of the existing national parliaments is less than 0.001% of the total population of the countries. For example, even the world's most strongest and loudest advocate of democracy, the United States of America has a congress of 535 members. 435 members in the House of Representatives and 100 members in the Senate. According to the US Census Bureau's population clock, the total estimated population of USA as of February 2018 is 327.16 million. This means that the total number of elected representatives of USA as a percentage of the total population of USA is around 0.0001%. So, having a system in which an increased number of individuals who can contribute to the decision making in matters relating to the whole society will only make the population better represented in the final decision, as against the argument that the number of online participants in political matters is not a good representation of all the individuals of a society.

It has already been argued that this representative model is in fact one of the main reasons for the loss of faith, and hence participation, among the masses towards the existing institutions of democratic governance. Major research works have come out to show that the interests of the masses are less important than the interests of the rich for the elected representatives, who go on to create and bring laws which are in the best interests of the rich and powerful (Piketty 2013). The rich and powerful are able to use their resources to lobby the elected representatives for protecting and furthering their interests, and the elected representatives work in the interest of this group instead of thinking and working in the best interests of the majority of the country population that has

elected them to work in their interests. So, it has become clear that a small number of elected representatives are being corrupted by the rich and powerful to act in their interest.

Based on this knowledge, would it not be better to include a larger number of individuals of the society to be actively participating, supporting, guiding or contesting the decisions of such a small group of elected representatives in order to improve the political decision making outcome for the whole society, instead of giving them complete authority to act on the behalf of the citizens? Direct democracy is exactly such a concept which has a very long history of debate and discussion between its supports and critics. Many of the advantages and disadvantages, along with the logistical and practical difficulties of making sure that direct democracy works as its intended to be, have attracted and keeps attracting a considerable amount of academic research as well (Romer & Rosenthal 1979; Lupia & Matsusaka 2004; Matsusaka 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2017; Bruno et al. 2010).

Some of the main advantages of direct democracy are quite easy to understand. First of all, the elected representatives would actually play a role of mediators between expert and public opinion against simply being the decision makers, which they are as of now, in the existing system of democratic governance. In spite of all the checks and balances that have been put in place for stopping any kind of misuse of power in such a small group of elected representatives, we have experienced the system's failure in making their power work for the benefit of the whole society and not just for a small sections of the rich and powerful (Piketty 2013).

The above drawback could be checked by having a larger group of individuals

participating in the decision making process. Although some may argue that it will reduce the speed of the whole process, it is definitely worth the extra time as the decisions will become much more harder to be rigged in favor of any one small group against the interest of a majority of the society. It is not to say that the individual members of the society will become immune to manipulation overnight through direct democracy practices. The practice of direct democracy helps the practitioners to improve their understanding of political processes over a period of time making them better at political participation for their own benefit. This is exactly what these new technologies are offering. So, even though the opinions of the individuals participating in the political matters through these new technologies may not be representative of the opinions of the whole society, they are much more representative compared to the decisions of any one single member of or the whole small group of elected representatives.

Even if representation by a large group of individuals is argued by some non-empirical researchers to be not representative of the interest of the whole society as all the online participants belong to a group of society who are not only able to have access and skills to engage with new information and communication technologies, but also the luxury of time to be able to spend it on topics which are not immediately having an impact on their lives, the important question to ask would be whether the participants believe that their representation is in the self interest of the participants themselves or in the general interest of the whole society. As it is clear that the elected representatives are working in their self interest by colluding with a small group of rich and powerful instead of working for the whole society, this question becomes very important if not the most important.

This research has this above specific perspective towards the matter of digital

divide and hence decided to include it in its questionnaire. The other main reason for its inclusion in the questionnaire was that most of the existing research on digital divide is either theoretical discussion or quantitative research based arguments either supporting or criticizing the concept of digital divide (Dijk 2006; Quan-Haase et al. 2016). "The next lacuna is a lack of *qualitative research*. Most digital divide research is based on quantitative data collection and tries to describe the large picture of the problem." (Dijk 2006: 232). There are hardly any research works who look at it from a qualitative research perspective. Few qualitative research works look at aspects relating to specific age groups like teenagers or senior citizens (Clark 2009; Quan-Haase et al. 2016). Keeping this in view, the below question was put to the interview participants:

"Some people say that most of the people who sign online petitions are people who have access to computers and Internet, and hence are from well off parts of society and do not represent the wishes of all sections of the society. What do you think about this? "

Where the question or the response was not clear, the below direct version of the question was asked:

"Do you think that the participants of these online petitions sign the petitions in their self interest, or in the interest of the society in general?"

Most of the participants' immediate response was that they indeed decide with the general interest of the society in mind. They raised the point that in most of the cases of their participation, the issue itself was such that the matter is in the

general interest of the society of which the participant is also a member and hence will be an indirect beneficiary. This remoteness itself is a major benefit of this process where the participant has nothing to gain in terms of material benefit as against a single elected representative or small group of them who may receive material gains if they act in the interest of an enterprise or a trade association. From the point of view of any organization or group that might benefit from a decision which might be against the general interests of the society, it would be very hard for them to influence a large number of individuals of the society who are not pre-selected and might change from case to case in place of a single elected representative or a group of them.

It is arguable that because the participants change from case to case, they may not be really invested in the topic and may participate without much thought or care for the outcome of their participation. But the interview responses of the participants of this research have clearly mentioned, that most of the times they have a good idea of the topic in which they are participating. They have been reading and discussing about the topic even before the petition came to their notice requesting their support. The participants have also been very clear in mentioning that if they do not know the topic well enough, they do not sign the petition. In some cases where the topic catches their attention and they are not sure about their knowledge regarding that topic, they conduct their own research and get to know the topic well enough before they venture towards taking an action. It is only after such reading and deliberation that they decide to sign the petition. In this manner, these new technologies are actually bringing even new topics into the purview of the participants.

The questions which were put to the interview participants that lead us for getting to this conclusion are as follows:

1. Do you sign all the petitions that you see from these platforms or choose to sign some and ignore some?

If yes, (follow on question) what is the basis of deciding which one to choose and which one to ignore?

2. Do you spend any time understanding the issue before you sign a petition?

If yes, (follow on question) how much?

3. Do you also do some personal research about the issue before signing a petition other than the information given by (online petitioning platform)?

If yes, (follow on question) what kind of research? And where do you look for more information?

4. Do you discuss the petitions you signed with any of your contacts like friends, family, co-workers, etc?

The other main reflection of most of the participants was that for some individuals who sign an online petition, there might be a self interest involved as the act of participation itself might give them a feeling of having done something or contributed towards an issue that they recognized as a problem in the society for which they wanted to help support a solution that was being proposed by some individual or an organization that started the petition. Most of the participants make sure that either they know the issue even before they saw the petition or that they do their research before signing any petition.

Although it was clear that they did not follow the petition or went searching for its outcome, it was also clear that they would only sign a petition if they knew about the topic and agreed with the solution or action that was being proposed to help move the topic towards a possible outcome that they would also like to see.

Many of the participants were also clear that they generally avoided signing petitions which were relating to a specific person or family and were related to topics that did not have much to do with the general influence on society. In other words, any topic that was too narrow in scope to be useful for the society in general.

5.2 Clicktivism

One of the other most prominent and much discussed criticisms of connective action is the aspect of 'Clicktivism'. Clicktivism is the label given to the processes that attempt to make the engagement of individuals in political issues easier through internet based tools such as online petitions, content sharing, social media buttons (eg. 'Like' button on facebook) etc. (Halupka 2014:1). Within the little recent research this concept has seen, there is a lack of a clear definition of clicktivism. In view of the vague manner in which clicktivism is identified, and the lack of a clear definition which would make it possible to conduct better research about the concept, Halupka has established a systematic heuristic for identifying clicktivism (Halupka 2014: 11-12).

Halupka defined clicktivism using seven important features. The first and foremost is that clicktivism is a political act that happens in a digital

environment. The second feature is the spontaneousness of the act itself. Although the act of clicking may happen after some thinking has been put into the topic, it is essentially done when someone is presented an issue, rather than the participant going in search of the issue. The third feature is that the participant is not seriously committed to the campaign after clicking a link. Most probably the participant will not know what happened with the campaign after the initial participation. Fourth feature is that anyone who is active in the digital environment has the possibility of participating. There is no need of any special skill or knowledge in order to participate. Fifth feature is that the clicktivist act is easily reproducible by anyone using the internet. The sixth feature is that the act of clicking a link is related to an established political object, and not created by the participant. The seventh and the final feature is that it is an action performed by an individual. To put it succinctly, it is a spontaneousness and non-committal political act which can be easily replicated by an individual and requires no specialized knowledge (Halupka 2018:132).

The word 'Slacktivism' is also used sometimes to describe clicktivism (Morozov 2009). Many of the established academic scholars who have written about clicktivism have been very critical of it (Putnam 2000; Shulman 2009; White 2010; Gladwell 2010), and have been using it as a derogatory term to describe the simple manner in which it makes it possible for individuals to participate in political issues. They express fear about the long term consequences of the ease of participating in political matters through internet based tools. For them, such ease gives the participants a feeling of participation and accomplishment without actually leading towards any impact on real life political outcomes, and will lead to reduction of substantive participatory efforts such as participating in street protests and demonstrations (Putnam 2000; Morozov 2009; Karpf 2010). This critical position of some academic

scholars has been the mainstay of academic literature on the topic of political participation through internet based tools. For them, it is not even political participation.

While Shulman (2009) criticized the low quality of the comments made by the citizens, along with the redundancy of the comments and the comment's insubstantiality, White (2010) argued that the inability of clicktivism to prove its efficiency in the form of immediate actual results is leading towards a loss of trust and decreasing interest in activism among many socially engaged individuals who saw digital technologies as a solution. Some of the critics were targeting the young people using the digital technologies for their political participation by suggesting that slactivism is an ideal form of activism for a lazy generation (Morozov 2009). The most critical of the criticisms has been the argument that these online forms of political participation are actually harmful for activism in general and will lead to a switch towards online forms of political participation eroding the actual physical protests and demonstrations (Putnam 2000).

In response to the criticism, there has also been an attempt made in order to argue in support of clicktivism. Couple of country specific research have done quantitative research arguing that online political participation has actually supported or complemented offline political participation in their specific country contexts and tried to find generalizations which might be applicable to other societies as well (Christensen 2012; Mazak & Stetka 2016) . While one of the more popular and one of the earlier research works that comes in defense of clicktivism, looks at one specific example of clicktivist activities,i.e., the mass email action alerts, using a quantitative study of one specific advocacy group's email activity (Karpf 2010), one of the latest looks at the legitimacy of

clicktivism as a political act (Halupka 2018). As far as qualitative research goes, there is hardly any.

Hence, although this research has a very limited scope of the total aspect of clicktivism, with a specific focus on what the participants themselves think about the criticism of clicktivism, that it leads towards the reduction of traditional forms of collective action, this research is unique because it takes up the matter from a qualitative research perspective. This research focuses on the opinion of the individual participants about their clicktivist activities and their opinion about what such activity means for traditional forms of collective actions of themselves and other participants like themselves, and also for the society in general.

The response of the participants has been an overwhelming disagreement with the criticism, which in the first place has mostly been theoretical and not based on any kind of empirical research. Most of the participants have clearly voiced their opinion that their participation in political matters through the digital technologies have not lead towards any reduction in their other methods of political participation. In fact, when asked their opinion about other participants, some of the participants were pro actively responding that, such online political participation would most probably lead to the participants becoming more engaged with the topic and increase the chances of their participation in other forms of traditional political participation activities instead of decreasing it. When such a question was put to the participants who were not pro actively saying this directly, asking if they thought that participants who might get an exposure to political participation through clicktivist activities might actually increase the chances of their participation in offline political participation activities also, the response has been almost

always a resounding 'Yes'.

The interviewees were also of the opinion that participants of these online political participation tools who were also active in traditional forms of political participation methods would never stop their traditional forms of political participation methods because of their participation in the online political participation methods. In rest of the cases, they were most probably not participants of any other traditional participation methods, and if not for their online participation they would not have been a part of any kind of political participation activities all together. So, in their opinion, participating through these online political participation tools would not reduce existing participation in any manner, but might actually encourage the participants to engage more with the political issues that they have been introduced to by these online tools, even through traditional methods.

In other words, people who were signing online petitions and also writing emails or joining physical protests or demonstrations on the streets, would never stop going to the protests or writing emails because of their online petition signatures. Also, people who have never been a part of any physical street protests and only recently started signing online petitions, were more likely to do more about the topic of the petition also through traditional political participation methods like donating money, sending an email, or join a protest or demonstration; as against those who might have never signed an online petition. In any of the scenarios, they did not believe that the quantity or quality of political participation was in any way negatively affected due to the introduction of the online methods of political participation.

This idea was very clearly articulated in response to the below question:

"Some people say that clicking a link on-line or sending an email does not do any good. In fact they claim that it reduces real world physical protest and demonstrations. What is your opinion about this?"

In all the research that has been done till now on the concept of clicktivism, one aspect that has not found much attention regarding the ease of participation criticism is relating to the advantages of making political participation easy. Although it is argued that if it is made easy, more and more individuals will choose to participate through online tools at the cost of traditional collective actions such as joining physical protests and public meetings which show the political strength in support of a particular issue or against it (Putnam 2000), there is not much research about what the advantages could be of clicktivism. Their major suggestion is that people on the streets shouting slogans and participating in demonstrations or protests is the most powerful of all mediums of political participation.

While this could have been the case in the pre-internet era, it is very strange to see the same argument to be continuously used in the present digital era as well where almost every aspect of human life, both private as well as public life, has been drastically modified. Even now, it is considered the best political act in which an individual can participate. All this focus on physical participation misses to realize that society has drastically changed since the advent of internet. Not only important commerce related issues like banking and shopping, but even the most common things one needs for maintenance of regular daily functioning such as groceries and household needs or even vegetables and fruits are being ordered and paid online and delivered to the

individual's door steps.

An argument given by the critics of clicktivism in support of their criticism is that political participation is a lot more serious issue and needs deep thinking, understanding, debate, and discussion compared to all other above mentioned activities that people do online. They claim that clicktivist action is spontaneous in nature and most of the participants do not have a good or indepth understanding of the issue which they are either supporting or opposing. They argue that the laypeople have neither the interest nor the ability to understand the issue to an extent which will make their participation valid.

But, as has been presented already in the previous section, the interview responses of the participants of this research have clearly mentioned, that most of the times they have a good idea of the topic in which they are participating. They have been reading and discussing about the topic even before the petition came to their notice requesting their support. The participants have also been very clear in mentioning that if they do not know the topic well enough, they do not sign the petition. In some cases where the topic catches their attention and they are not sure about their knowledge regarding that topic, they conduct their own research and get to know the topic well enough before they venture towards taking an action. It is only after such reading and deliberation that they decide to sign the petition. In this manner, these new technologies are actually bringing even new topics into the purview of the participants. Even though they have been presented in the previous section, it might be useful to have a re-look at the questions here again which allowed us to come to this conclusion.

The questions which were put to the interview participants that lead us for getting to this conclusion are as follows:

1. Do you sign all the petitions that you see from these platforms or choose to sign some and ignore some?

If yes, (follow on question) what is the basis of deciding which one to choose and which one to ignore?

2. Do you spend any time understanding the issue before you sign a petition?

If yes, (follow on question) how much?

3. Do you also do some personal research about the issue before signing a petition other than the information given by Avaaz?

If yes, (follow on question) what kind of research? And where do you look for more information?

4. Do you discuss the petitions you signed with any of your contacts like friends, family, co-workers, etc?

Most importantly for our discussion, the field of communication, again both private and public, has been increasingly moving towards the digital environment. New technologies have brought not only individuals but also whole communities from large sections of hitherto remote and inaccessible geographical areas back in touch with the general population of the world allowing them access to all the latest developments in all aspects of human life, from expert and highly advanced medical care, or best education of top universities, to either receiving better banking solution or shopping for the best

products. By allowing people from any part of the world to raise and garner attention for local issues or injustices at a regional, national or global level, which would have been almost impossible before the advent of the digital era, the new technologies have proven to be a very strong political tool.

Examples of the international attention on a local elected representative leading towards a positive outcome for the local population are many. One of the famous examples of such an action is relating to the Maasai people from Tanzania in Africa. Tanzanian government was trying to evict the Maasai people from their ancestral land to create a hunting ground where rich people from the Middle East could go hunting for prized wild life. A petition was started in support of local NGOs working on this matter which was signed by 2.3 million people from all over the world, resulting in the Tanzanian President promising on Twitter that the government would never evict the Maasai people from their ancestral land.

In addition, some participants of the interviews done as part of this research have been very happy with the new possibilities that have been opened up for people who might have been interested in becoming actively involved with political matters but have been forced to stay away because of their specific personal situation. This has been especially highlighted in the cases of older individuals who cannot be physically active, or the physically handicapped individuals. Also, many care givers, and especially mothers who might be juggling a whole lot of issues relating to their kids and family members, although they might be strongly interested in participating somehow in the political and social issues, would not have been able to participate. The possibility to participate through online tools has been a big boon for such a group of members of a society.

Not only such a group who might have been interested and could not participate, but also the group that would have thought that it is too much of an effort to participate in political matters and stayed away, would now be able to participate without the high cost that they felt political participation entails. Although the number of such participants who have started to take an active part after being introduced to political participation through the online tools is small, it is very clear that at least a small percentage of the participants of these new technologies based political participation processes would have not participated in any form of political participation if not for these new online tools. This is evident from the response of some of the participants of this research who have clearly described that if not for these online tools, they would have never known the topics that they actually got involved with, and that they would have never started to get active in political matters. The responses of the participants of this research in answering to couple of later questions in the interview process makes it amply clear that they have indeed been very useful in bringing new topics and issues to their attention which might not have been possible if not for the existence of these new digital technology based participation tools.

The questions that were put to the interview participants were as follows:

1. "Did you start reading about or participating in any other form of political issues, or started doing it more actively, after starting to sign online petitions? If yes, (follow on question) do you think signing online petitions increased your interest in social / political issues? "

2.If online petitioning platforms like Avaaz.org or Change.org did not exist,

would you have been as active in social issues as you are now?

If no, (follow on question) why not?

If yes, (follow on question) how would you have been active? What would you be doing? Which organizations or teams would you have joined?

5.3 Simplification

In spite of all the existing research on different aspects of collective as well as connective action, one of the most common criticisms that does not get much attention among the academic researchers is the aspect relating to the quantity and quality of the subject matter of online petitions and their presentation. Most of the little available research which deals with the subject matter or content of online petitions have looked at it from the perspective of anonymity, topics, tones and cues, or sponsors of discussion or using the concept of Framing (Jungherr & Jurgens 2010; Sriprasit 2014; Wright 2015).

Framing is a conceptional tool from the Communication and Media Studies departments commonly used to study the perspective or angle in which the topic is being presented or looked at, and the effects such framing has on the manner in which the topic is perceived by the target population and the final outcome (McAdam 1982; Entman 1993; Benford & Snow 2004; Williams 2004; Noakes & Johnston 2005; Kitzinger 2007; Hertog & McLeod 2008; Moussa 2013; Della Porta & Parks 2014). The most well know types of framing have been put out by dividing framing into diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing which help to understand the processes of identifying the problem, proposing a solution, and then motivating to take action (Della Porta

& Parks 2014). Other than the above mentioned ones, there is almost no qualitative research trying to understand the actual beliefs and opinions of the online petitioning participants themselves regarding the content of the online petitions. This is where this particular research majorly contributes to the existing research on this topic.

The question that this research put to the interview participants relating to this topic is as follows:

1. Some people say that online petitions do not present all the complexities involved in an issue and tries to over simplify them to fit in one email. What do you think about this?

To better understand the opinions of the interview participants, in most of the cases, they were asked few follow up questions, such as:

Do you feel that the information given in the petitions is enough to take a decision?

Do you feel that the petitions are presenting facts from only one perspective?

Did you ever feel that the petition was giving false or incorrect information?

Most of the responses of the participants to the main question have agreed with the statement. In few instances they disagreed, but a huge majority (60 out of 76 interview participants) agreed with the statement. But again, most of the participants who agreed, were also of the view that this simplification did not

mean that the petition was not clear in putting forward what it wanted to communicate to the petition participants. They were in fact supportive of this whole idea that in order to reach the most number of participants, the petitions have to be small and simple. For them it was a necessary condition in order to increase the reach and visibility of the petition. They were of the opinion that if the content of the petition was too long or too detailed, some of the participants may be put off and never even start reading the petition content. They would directly ignore it or delete it if they found the explanation of the petition too long or detailed.

The interview participants highlighted that once the petition participants started to read the petition, if they found the content matter insufficient to take a decision or were interested in knowing more about the issue, they could always go on to do more research of their own. It was not lost on some of the participants of this research that the petitions themselves had links to other websites and reading material which gave a much more detailed explanation about the topic of the petition along with various pro and cons of signing the petition. They were also very clear that, even if such links were not available, one can always go on the internet to do their own research to find out more about the topic of the petition in order to get a better understanding of the topic before going on to decide whether to sign, ignore, or even go on to search and find an opposing petition.

Few of the participants of the online petitions who disagreed with the statement, were of the opinion that the information given in the petition emails give all the necessary information about the topic of the petition. They find the content of the petitions clear and presenting all the facts of the case. Even if the information may not be in detail, it is enough to be able to understand the topic

and go ahead to decide what to do with the petition, i.e., sign it or ignore it. One major statement made by all the petition participants was that generally the petitions are about a topic that they have known from a longer period or there has been a discussion going on in the media and society for some time. In these cases, they already knew the topic from different perspectives and many advantages and disadvantages of either supporting or not supporting the petition. So, the information in the petitions was only a re-iteration of what they already knew and hence they did not need any detailed information about the topic of the petition.

When asked if the petitions were generally favoring any one particular perspective as against the other perspectives that may be existing, the petition participants were clear to mention that they knew it very well that anyone who is starting a petition is interested in getting a certain outcome that they agree or support for a particular cause. Many of them mentioned that petitions fundamentally have the characteristic that they are presented from one perspective and want a specific outcome. They had the knowledge that especially because of this reason, one has to know who is starting a petition and what is their motivation for starting and spreading the petition. Most of the petition participants who agreed with the perspective presented in the petition, went on to sign the petition. If not, they ignored the petition. In some cases, some participants even mentioned that they went on to search if there was any other petition which was presenting any other perspective which they particularly felt would be more agreeable for them for this particular topic.

In spite of any disagreement that the petition participants had with the perspective of the creators of the petition, almost all the petition participants replied that they have never come across any false or incorrect facts or claims

being presented in the petitions. They might not agree with the argument being made in the petition or sometimes even did feel that the petition itself was really a waste of their time and should not even exist, they did not see any false information being given in support of a petition.

5.4 Sovereignty

Among all the above criticisms, while the first two are the most popular and well known and discussed criticisms of online petitions, even by the scholars in academia; the third is one of the well known and often presented criticism, but has almost no academic research at all. One particular criticism that is not even presented in most of the academic literature about online petitioning is the issue of Sovereignty within the purview of online petitions which are not started by the governments themselves or with a local perspective. Since many of the online petitions started by many of the popular online petitioning platforms such as Avaaz.org are gathering signatures all over the world and present them to local and nationally elected leaders to act on specific causes, there arises an issue of how an elected representative of one region or nation is being demanded to act on issues by citizens of more than one nation. This basic commonsensical question is often rebuked based on a simple assumption that such an action is based on solidarity and does not need any serious thought. The author of this work has been baffled with such visible lack of importance for this aspect, and the attention it did not raise even after raising the issue during multiple discussions with colleagues and fellow scholars.

The responses to the question relating to this aspect of online petitions has presented a very interesting new development which has almost never been

highlighted in any of the other research. Of course the main reasons for it is also because such a question has never been taken up by any other research, most probably based on their belief that it is a very simple matter of solidarity with fellow human beings. Most of the participants of online petitions which were dealing with such a local or national issue and gathering signatures from individuals all over the world were of the opinion that they had the right to demand such action from the local or national level elected representatives of even other nations of which they were not citizens or even remotely connected, as long as the topic of the online petition was relating, even remotely, anything to do with nature and fundamental rights. Nature here includes almost anything and everything related to the earth, animals, forests, oceans, etc., of that sort, and fundamental rights includes almost anything and everything related to human rights, animal rights, environmental rights, etc., of that sort.

The above mentioned right to demand such action from even elected representative of other nations or even remote local regions far away from their geographical location, was based on their strong belief that the topics relating to any of the above themes have a global impact and influence each and every living organism including all the animals, plants, and humans on Earth. The main point to observe here being that their action was based not on solidarity as was imagined by many until now, but based on a feeling of a right to demand such an action. This rights perspective in comparison to the existing solidarity perspective raises a major point of contention.

Even when it was stressed by the interviewer that they were not the citizens of those countries whose elected representatives were being asked to act on the issue, the interview participants were highlighting with clarity that they do not need to be the citizens of any one country to demand an action from the elected

representative of that specific country. They believed that they had the right to demand such action based on the fact that when the people being asked to act on the issue were elected representatives of the region or nation in which the issue is being raised and the topic of the petition has an influence all over the globe, even individuals from other nations would have a right to demand them to act in the interest of not only their own electorate but also the individuals of the whole world. So, the elected representatives, although were elected by the locally registered voters, the elected representatives had responsibility towards the population of the whole world and not just for the locally registered voters.

Although leaders of nations are usually addressed as world leaders during international events or at the meetings of the UN, and deemed to be discussing important matters relating to the whole world and acting on them, it is not based on any constitutional responsibility similar to their accountability to the national constitutions of the countries where they are elected. There are few major United Nations (UN) organizations such as the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) or the International Court of Justice (ICJ) where agreements are signed by a majority of world nations, but reaching them is very hard for any individual or local groups and their process is very long and convoluted. The issues that can be taken to these forums are also of very severe nature which have already been done and can be proven with hard evidence, throwing out any chance of taking issues relating to the present and future which might have an impact. Their powers are also very limited and their funding is almost always in peril. The solidarity perspective prevails in the academic discourse mainly because of the above circumstances, but the belief of the interview participants of this research which highlights a rights perspective of all human beings to demand action of elected representatives all over the world forces us to re-consider this aspect of demands by individuals

from elected representatives keeping aside the geographical and political borders that exist.

The one word that was very regularly used by many interview participants to describe themselves or their connection to the issue in order to be able to demand such action from even elected representatives of other nations was "Global". They answered to the question using terms such as '*global citizen, citizen of the world, global community, global village, global issue, globally connected, etc*'. They felt that for any petition relating to the whole world they had the right to demand such action, and the elected representatives at any and all levels all over the world have a responsibility to listen and act in the best interests of all the people of the world. The above "global" term was not limited to responses from one particular country or region, as some of the interview participants from all the four countries included in this research used the word to answer this question.

A 29 year old women from Delhi who works as a Public Relations professional said, "*....we are all connected by common causes, today we are all global citizens....*".

A 53 year old cartoon journalist from Sao Paulo answered, "*...i am a person of the same world that they live, and we are responsible.*",

A 49 year old Information Technology engineer from San Francisco suggested, "*....everybody is now globally connected, so atleast you can express your anger or your dismay over that matter....*"

A 37 year old Technical Analyst from Frankfurt replied, "*....all the countries*

are part of the planet of course. We are part of a global community..."

A 20 year old student from Mumbai remarked, "..today we live in a global county, global village, its not a particular country on its own. Everyone is connected to each other in every country, so no country is alone.....its a responsibility of a global citizen to help as much as he can..."

A 49 year old freelance journalist from Frankfurt replied, "..the right as a human, not looking at any particular country but as a global.....i don't see myself as a German, I see myself as a citizen of the world.."

The above mentioned responses of the interview participants were given in reply to the below questions. To make sure that the question and its intentions were clear to the participants, questions were asked in an incremental manner. The first question was:

Online petitions collect signatures on petitions on various issues from different regions of the world. Do you have any thoughts about this?

If the question was not clear for the participants, a more direct question was asked as follows:

Some of the online petitions are relating to a particular group of people or a national or local issue, and the petition is asking your support. Do you sign such petitions?

Based on the responses received, a different question was put if it was a 'yes' or a 'no'. If the response was a 'no', they were asked the reasoning for not signing such petitions, and for 'yes' responses, the below question was asked:

If someone says that the local minister/authority has no responsibility to answer to your demands as you are not that country citizen, and hence you have no right to demand any action from that country's elected representatives, what would be your response?

In addition to the above question which was asked in the middle of the interview, couple of questions which came much earlier in the interview asked directly if the interview participant had signed petitions relating to countries other than his/her own country, and if they gave more importance to petitions relating to issues concerning with their nation or region in the below form.

Did you sign any petition relating to any country other than (country of participant)?

While for a response of 'no' a follow up question 'why' was asked, when the answer was yes a follow up question was put as below.

Do you give more importance to petitions from (your country or region) compared to petitions relating to other countries/regions?

In most of the cases where the answer was a 'no', it was mainly because the interview participants had never received any petition relating to any country

other than their own. The participants thought that the petition platforms might be sending them only their local or regional petitions. In cases where the participants had received petitions relating to other countries and the answer was still a 'no', many interview participants were of the opinion that it was very important for them to know all the details of the local issue, before they would decide to sign the petition. They articulated the concern that if they did not know the complete details and went ahead to support the petition, it could cause damage to the locals instead of supporting them. So, in these cases they believed that refraining from signing the petition was the best route ahead for them and hence did not sign the petition.

When probed further if they would sign a petition relating to other countries if they had received them and had all the necessary information to proceed, the participants almost always answered that they would sign the petition even if it was not relating to their country based on the fact that their participation in the online petitions was because they were interested in the topic of the petition and not because the topic of the petition was relating to their country. For them borders were not important and did not matter, it was the topic that was important.

In only few of the interviews, the participants were of the opinion that even if they would sign petitions from all over the world, they would be more interested in petitions relating to topics that were related to their own nation or geographical region. But even in these cases where the participants felt that they gave more importance to petitions of their nation or region, they were mostly of that opinion because they believed they had better knowledge of the topic and a better understanding of even nuanced arguments being made on

either side of the petition. They felt that this made them feel more confident about their decision to either support or ignore a petition as against petitions relating to geographically far away regions. The other factor that came up in the discussions was also that the participants felt capable of doing more about the issue directly, and participating in other forms of action beyond signing petitions if the issue was relating to their own nation or region.

In response to any petition that was dealing with local issues and did not have any global impact where the interview participants had signed the petitions, the answer then turned to generally available concept of "humanity" or "solidarity", which was also the most common reason that came up in the author's many discussions with colleagues relating to this topic for actually not taking up this research question at all. Most of the participants of these online petitions who signed the petitions that were more of a local nature in other countries, signed it in solidarity with the locals who were supporting a certain action to be done in their local community interest. So, this solidarity perspective is valid only in this specific case, and in all other matters the rights perspective was the basis of the action. This rights perspective is not recognized by anyone till now.

A very interesting response in a couple of cases of the participants signing petitions relating to local issues in other countries or regions was that they viewed any act supporting a local issue in any part of the world could very well be used as a precedence or juris prudence all over the world, i.e., an example of some action in some other part of the world that can be used as a showcase for demanding similar action in their own local or national community. They were of the belief that although the topic of the petition was local and had absolutely no practical impact beyond a small geographical area such as a town or

municipality, they felt that same issues or issues similar to the topic of the petition existed in their own town or municipality too and they supported the petition in those cases with the idea that if the petition succeeded in other geographical areas, then they could also achieve success on that topic in their own local geographical area. For example, a participant from Rio de Janeiro who has signed local petitions about food products produced based on GMO technology to clearly label on the food packaging when it is sold in the Brazilian markets that the food was GMO technology based food remarked:

"...this is a case where I think its effective. I have signed many petitions about labeling GMOs in other countries because I think it opens precedence, it creates juris prudence.....so it can influence other countries...."

A very similar response was given by another interview participant who is also from Rio de Janeiro. It is quite interesting to note that both these remarks were made by interview participants in Rio de Janeiro, although they were not connected to each other in any way. Such remarks from people of Brazil might give us a glimpse into understanding why Brazil is one of the countries of the world with the highest percentage of participants in online political activities.

The problems that affect the people all over the globe keep on increasing, and attempts by national and international leaders to solve these issues have not seen any major success that would give us all the confidence that we will be able to handle these issues at least in the future if not immediately. The only major institution that had some success in this matter has been the United Nations(UN). Although UN had a good start and gained in strength until the

end of 1990s, due to the unilateral actions of the USA in the last couple of decades, even the UN has seen a regular eradication of any confidence that it had created in its ability to deal with the global challenges in an effective manner in the future. Even a much smaller organization with a smaller jurisdiction in the form of the European Union (EU) has had a similar experience. It started slow and steadily gained strength over a period of few decades, only to see its authority being questioned and criticized by quite a few of its own member states and even deciding to exit from the union recently.

Under these circumstances, where leaders are not able to create a united front at the global level to handle the ever growing challenges which cannot be handled by any one country of the world on its own, the emergence of new organizations which are started with a bottom up approach based on the idea of collecting the interests and opinions of the individual persons all over the world on issues that are global, regional, national or even local and directing such mass opinion towards the specific elected authority that has the responsibility to act upon the particular issue about which the opinions are collected, is a very interesting development which has to be thoroughly understood. It becomes even necessary for studying them not only because of the increasing number of individuals from all corners of the globe who are supporting such organizations in any manner that is at their disposal, but also the increasing number of campaigns by such organizations which are being highlighted as successful in helping to find solutions to the issues that are being raised. This is especially important because even though it is not easy to find the effectiveness of these organizations in finding solutions for the issues they raise, or to measure their direct contribution or impact on the final outcome of the solution for the issue that is raised, these organizations are increasingly gathering new supporters

from all corners of the world.

In spite of the fact that these new organizations have no binding legal framework such as one created by the international organizations such as the UN or the EU, they are claiming victory on many contemporary issues. The manner in which they are collecting public opinion and channeling it to resolve issues at different levels irrespective of whether it be a local issue or a global issue should be raising many questions. A huge majority of the individuals signing the petitions may be from outside the nation in which the issue is located and hence they have no right to demand any action from the locally elected representative within the national or international legal constitutional framework. The main tactic that is put into use is that of public attention on a particular position within the governing authority whose occupant is put under pressure because of the local, national or international attention that might be gathering on that particular issue for which the occupant is responsible.

Within the existing political and governance structures of the popular representative democratic form of governance, the conventional argument of the political participants has been that they have a constitutional right to demand action from their elected representative and the elected representatives have a responsibility to listen to the individuals and act in the interest of the individuals who they are representing. But this constitutional structure has been slowly losing participants over the last couple of decades as the results were not visible to the participants, and these new organizations which have only public attention as a tool are claiming victories and bringing new participants to political participation. This clearly shows a case of loss of sovereignty for the countries whose elected representative are being put under pressure by the

petition signing individuals from all corner of the globe to act in a certain manner, even though it is not clear to the elected representatives whether if any at all, or how many of thee participants of that petition were of their own nation or from other nations. It might also be the case that the issue of the petition might actually be making matters worse for a country in terms of its own national priorities and ambitions.

A good example of such a case is the issue of nuclear energy. While a developing nation such as India which needs huge amounts of energy to bring its population out of poverty is trying to start new nuclear energy plants within its own geographical limits, a massive number of individuals from all over the world, especially from the post-industrialized countries such as Germany have been signing petitions to reduce nuclear energy plants all over the world in spite of their own past usage of such nuclear energy for their own economic improvement. Although this issue has its own supporters and opponents within India, the government realized that the issue was being put under pressure mainly with the support from outside the country leading to restrictions on many non-profit and non-governmental organizations supporting the local opponents of nuclear energy.

The above example brings into attention the conflict these kinds of new organizations create between local or national governments working in the interest of its own constituents being forced to look at the impact of their actions on the whole world and not just in their limited geographical location. While the perspective of the local government is local, these new organizations are forcing to change the narrative and present the global perspective on the particular issue of the petition. In this manner, the local or national

governments are losing their sovereignty to public pressure from all over the world highlighting the global population as a major opinion creator and actor independent of any one specific local or national government. This matter of loss of sovereignty is almost absent from the academic literature within the scope of online petitions.

This research makes a start by introducing the issue and problematizing it in this specific context. It attacks the general assumption that a global action in support of local issues done through most of these new organizations is based on solidarity. Using a qualitative empirical research, it presents a different perspective focused on the right to demand action based on an identification of global citizenship or community that most of the participants of these new organizations hold and base their actions upon. This new perspective allows us to imagine a new structure that might make it possible to solve the contemporary issues which need a global response. It brings into discussion not the traditionally understood concept of a global citizenship, but a new kind of global citizenship that is based on the self belief of the individual persons all over the world to have the right to demand action from elected representatives of not only their political unit but also from any national, regional or local geographical and political jurisdictions as well. It is about their connection with not only the other humans of the world but also all natural things on earth. A belief that all those things within nature such as even forests, rivers or mountains are living beings and how humans treat them has an influence on the well being of the whole planet, including the humans. Based on this kind of rights perspective of the individuals participating in the online petitions from any part of the world, an argument can definitely be raised that these online petitioning platforms are reducing the sovereign authority of institutions such

as nation states and their leaders, forcing them to act in line with the beliefs of the individuals from all over the world signing online petitions targeting them, and not just in the interests of a part or whole of their own electorate to whom they are constitutionally accountable.

6. Conclusion

The hypothesis that motivated and directed this research argued that *the web movements described in this research are similar to factory councils; and these web movements are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses to become organic intellectuals themselves.*

In simple words, the above hypothesis is arguing that *a new kind of social movements are not only introducing individuals from within the masses to new political and social topics, and raising their interest and activity in political education and participation, but also enabling their ability to learn, discuss, deliberate, share, and organize themselves for making the political institutions of the society to work for their interests.*

Concepts such as web movements, factory councils, intellectuals, and organic intellectuals are key building blocks of the above hypothesis. Web movements are defined in this research as a new kind of social movements where a collective of individuals or groups are using new technologies, such as the internet, to set their own priorities based on frequent member polls and raise funds through voluntary donations from interested members in order to act on any issue of public concern in any part of the world with a core belief of global interdependence.

Factory councils is a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci during the industrial revolution period with the aim of attaining a worker's democracy, built on the democratic participation of the workers of the factories in the everyday decisions of the factories in order to understand how democracy works. Through everyday participation, the workers would learn the skills to

organize themselves, understand the different group interests, and try to come to a decision agreeable to all the parties involved, inculcating a deep understanding of how democracy works. By inculcating such kind of thinking and deep understanding, workers would be able to understand the functioning of democracy even at a societal level. This transformation is based on the rising of the political consciousness of the workers because of the practice of democratic participation.

Intellectuals and organic intellectuals are the other two main concepts forming part of the above hypothesis. The definition of intellectuals and organic intellectuals used in this research is also based on the interpretation presented by Antonio Gramsci. He greatly extended the notion of intellectuals redefining it to include anyone who functions as an organizer, administrator, director, educator or leader of others in society.

Gramsci differentiates intellectuals into two categories, traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. While traditional intellectuals refers to a category of intellectuals already in existence representing a historical continuity and special qualification based on their ability to understand and work on complex ideas of specific fields; by organic intellectuals Gramsci refers to intellectuals who come into existence naturally, undertaking an essential new function in any part of the society such as the economic, social and political fields. While an entrepreneur is an organic intellectual who has organized the confidence of employees, investors and customers; within the social and political field, individuals join civil society organizations, NGOs or political parties to attain and implement deliberative and organizational skills becoming organic intellectuals.

The hypothesis presented in this research was formulated in order to aid the process of finding an answer to the research question: how are digital technologies helping in the development process of organic intellectuals?

The above research question is based on two main assumptions. First assumption is that there is an ongoing process of development of organic intellectuals in our society, and the second assumption is that digital technologies are helping the above development of organic intellectuals. It was primarily aimed at understanding how the concept of organic intellectuals was being impacted by the latest developments in digital technologies.

The concept of organic intellectuals gained the interest of the author of this thesis during the process of understanding how technological advancements are impacting the processes of globalization, especially the process of political globalization. The process of political globalization has been very slow compared to other aspects of globalization, such as economic and cultural globalizations. The globally mobile financial capital, the global markets, etc are good examples of the economic globalization, whereas the transnational influence of commercial feature length Hollywood films, music industry, the spread and standardization of global food chains and global soft drink brands, dressing styles, etc are good examples of the cultural globalization processes. Compared to such advances in these aspects of globalization, developments in political aspects at a similar global level have been non-existent.

The reason for the specific interest of this researcher in the concept of organic intellectuals is because of the purpose and the manner in which the concept was conceptualized by Gramsci. Gramsci took up the concept of organic intellectuals for aiding his understanding about how new ideas came into

prevalence in any society by overthrowing the existing dominant ideas of a society, and who is responsible for such a change. Gramsci explained the dominance of any idea in a society using the concept of 'Hegemony'. He used the concept 'Hegemony' in order to understand the behavior of individual members of the society with an intention to change their behavior. Gramsci attempted to understand the process of such an arrival of new dominant ideas with a specific purpose of bringing about a change in the society.

The above-presented hypothesis that drove this research, is making the argument that a new idea is trying to replace the existing dominant idea and is in the early stage of becoming a new hegemony. The existing structure of governance is presently working in cohorts with the few rich individuals of the society and is working for them even if their interest is against the interests of a majority of the society, this is the new idea. The existing dominant idea is that the existing neo-liberal globalization is working in the best interests of the whole society, and will eventually benefit all sections of the society. The existing negative effects of the latter ideology are seen as temporary stages towards reaching its ultimate goal of working for the benefit of all sections of the society.

The new idea, which is the emerging counter hegemonic idea, has gained the required momentum, and is at a stage where it has acquired the cultural and ideological support from a large number of individuals of the society. It is now aiming towards turning the cultural and ideological support into a political project. The idea is inspiring the individual members of the society to reject any decision of the elected representatives, if the decisions do not seem to be in the best interests of a majority of the sections of the society. They are proposing alternative policies which will turn the governance towards the interests of a

majority of sections of the society. Most of the mass street demonstrations, signing petitions, and writing letters to elected representatives that are gaining such huge attention from the individuals from different corners of the world are some of the examples of such political projects.

While the above explanation presented one part of the hypothesis, the other part of the hypothesis is relating to the changes in our society which are impacting the first part of the hypothesis. The changes in our society which this research is considering as the catalyst, are the technological advancements made in the communication technologies sector, primarily the internet. Internet has impacted almost all aspects of our society within a very short period since its commencement, i.e., the early 1990s. This research especially focuses on the concept of network society. It is a concept which gained prominence based on the work of Manuel Castells. According to Castells, network society is the social structure that characterizes society in the early 21st century.

Network society is constructed around digital networks of communication. Castells' work on this topic became a well-known trilogy, named as The Information Age. Based on his trilogy, he ventured further into understanding the power of communication. A part of his theoretical framework within this new work deals with the cognitive processing of the signals presented by the communication system to the human mind as it relates to politically relevant social practice. He does this by analyzing the relationships between emotion, cognition, and politics. He suggests that greater autonomy made possible by latest digital technologies, increases the chances of new values and new interests entering the public mind; and encourages social change. Castells sees the origin of political mobilization in the human mind, and suggests that such mobilization leads to increase in the participation of individuals in the public

sphere, through their political participation. He considers collective actions which transform the values and institutions of society as social movements.

One of Castells' books, *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the Internet Age*, deals with the subject of social movements. He concludes it by saying that social movements challenge the legitimacy of the political representatives based on their collaboration with big corporations, which makes it hard for institutions lead by these representatives to accept social movements. Based on the explanation of the features of such social movements by Castells, this research compares them with a new kind of social movement built on the foundations of the latest digital technologies and the changing societal values.

One of the organizations at the global level which fits the bill of this new kind of social movements, Avaaz.org, calls itself a web movement. Using the work processes of organizations similar to Avaaz.org, we can define them as a collective of individuals or groups who are using new technologies, such as the internet, to set their own priorities based on frequent member polls and raise funds through voluntary donations from interested members in order to act on any issue of public concern in any part of the world with a core belief of global interdependence. These web movements support Castells' interpretation that the major social movements of the last decade suggest a general emphasis of these movements on increasing the participation, deliberation and decision-making by the individual citizens all over the world. This pragmatic understanding of web movements resonates very closely to the concepts of factory councils and organic intellectuals.

The hypothesis presented in this research argues that the web movements are similar to the concept of factory councils as presented by Gramsci, and that the

web movements are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses to become organic intellectuals themselves.

To examine this hypothesis, it needs to be examined whether web movements are indeed similar to factory councils, and whether some organic intellectuals are indeed representing the masses and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals. This research was based on a qualitative analysis of the responses given by individuals participating in the web movements. Online petitioning platforms like Avaaz.org, Change.org, etc., were selected as the cases, and individuals who signed petitions on these online platforms were interviewed using a semi-structured interview to gather the data needed to test the hypothesis.

This research proceeded to check if the web movements are similar to factory councils based on four of the main features of factory councils i.e., *individual participation, geographical inclusion, deliberation, and social organization*. The data presented in the chapter 'Data Analysis and Discussion' and the interpretation of the data, allowed us to conclude that these above four features are indeed helpful to come to the conclusion that web movements are similar to factory councils. The concept of factory councils is explained in detail in the chapter 'Antonio Gramsci', whereas the concept of web movements is explained in detail in the chapter 'Information Age'.

The chapter 'Data Analysis and Discussion' also presents the data and discussion which helps to support the argument that these web movements are indeed not only introducing individuals from within the masses to new political and social topics, and raising their interest and activity in political education

and participation, but also enabling their ability to learn, discuss, deliberate, share, and organize. These are the steps needed for an individual to move from the stage of spontaneous philosophy to critical philosophy and become an organic intellectual. This allowed us to conclude that the second part of the argument made in this research that some intellectuals are representing the masses, and helping some of the other individuals from the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals, is indeed true. Hence, the overall argument that the web movements described in the previous chapter are similar to factory councils; and are right now in the transitional stage where intellectuals within the web movements are representing the masses, and also helping the masses towards becoming organic intellectuals themselves, is validated.

As this research is focusing specifically on studying online petitioning platforms for its data collection, the research also examines couple of main aspects of the online environment in relation to a global web movement. One is relating to the major criticisms of online political participation such as 'Digital Divide', 'clicktivism', and 'Simplification', while the second is relating to the dilution of the concept of 'Sovereignty' that is being highlighted by the participation of individuals from all over the world irrespective of their nationalities in issues that are relating to other sovereign nations.

New forms of participation in political matters through internet-based tools are changing the manner in which individuals view and engage with democracy. This new development based on the proliferation of digital technologies in political matters is attracting young scholars from various academic disciplines, especially from the political sciences and political communication departments. These scholars have brought into existence a new perspective to look at the relationship between digital technologies and politics, which has allowed them

to strongly argue against the existing derogatory attitude of the conventional scholars towards the usage of internet-based tools for political participation. Connective action, as against the traditional importance given to collective action, has emerged from the new scholars as a central concept for theoretical and empirical research in the study of political participation in a digital environment.

The concept of connective action is in line with other concepts that have been gaining ground in order to study the changes happening in political participation in the internet era. 'Everyday makers' and 'information activism' are good examples of such similar concepts. All these new concepts are based on the idea that the traditional concepts of political participation, as a process of conflict between different viewpoints or group interests in order to arrive at a common ground and reach a consensus, are unable to help us understand the contemporary methods of political participation by individuals focusing on personalization and individualization of political matters. They bring a breath of fresh air into the academic literature which has mostly been critical of political participation happening on the internet.

The criticisms of the conventional scholars has been based on their perspective of analyzing connective action through the lens used for studying collective action. For them, connective action is at best a tool to be used by collective action actors for achieving their goals. They were also criticizing the early enthusiastic research on the potential of internet for reshaping democracy based on the normative values of direct democracy and public sphere. They were criticizing the claims that internet offered a solution for removing the shortcomings of traditional democratic institutions and give power back to the people. Some of the most visible and loud criticisms they aired are relating to

the aspects of digital divide and clicktivism. There are couple of other criticisms that did not receive as much attention as the above two, but are nonetheless equally important. One is relating to the simplification of the issue in an attempt to present the topic in a single email or webpage, and the other is relating to the aspect of sovereignty. The latter among these criticisms is a new aspect which is related specifically to the petitions that are targeted at issues in a specific geographical region or group and collecting signatures from all over the world.

The last particular criticism of the above four criticisms is not even presented in most of the academic literature about online petitioning, which deals with the issue of sovereignty within the purview of online petitions that are not started by the governments themselves or with a local perspective. Since many of the online petitions started by many of the popular online petitioning platforms such as Avaaz.org are gathering signatures all over the world and present them to local and nationally elected leaders to act on specific causes, there arises an issue of how an elected representative of one region or nation is being demanded to act on issues by citizens of more than one nation. This basic commonsensical question is often rebuked based on a simple assumption that such an action is based on solidarity and does not need any serious thought. The author of this work has been baffled with such visible lack of importance for this aspect, and the attention it did not raise even after raising the issue during multiple discussions with colleagues and fellow scholars.

The responses to the question relating to this aspect of online petitions has presented a very interesting new development which has almost never been highlighted in any of the other research. Of course, the main reason for it is also that such a question has never been taken up by any other research, most

probably based on the belief that it is a very simple matter of solidarity with fellow human beings. Most of the participants of online petitions which were dealing with such a local or national issue and gathering signatures from individuals all over the world were of the opinion that they had the right to demand such action from the local or national level elected representatives of even other nations of which they were not citizens or even remotely connected, as long as the topic of the online petition was relating, even remotely, anything to do with nature and fundamental rights. Nature here includes almost anything and everything related to the earth, animals, forests, oceans, etc., of that sort, and fundamental rights includes almost anything and everything related to human rights, animal rights, or environmental rights.

The right to demand such action from even elected representative of other nations or even remote local regions far away from their geographical location, was based on their strong belief that the topics relating to any of the above themes have a global impact and influence each and every living organism including all the animals, plants, and humans on Earth. The main point to observe here being that their action was based not on solidarity as was imagined by many until now, but based on a feeling of a right to demand such an action. This rights-perspective in comparison to the existing solidarity-perspective raises a major point of contention.

Even when it was stressed by the interviewer that they were not the citizens of those countries whose elected representatives were being asked to act on the issue, the interview participants were highlighting with clarity that they do not need to be the citizens of any one country to demand an action from the elected representative of that specific country. They believed that they had the right to demand such action based on the fact that when the people being asked to act

on the issue were elected representatives of the region or nation in which the issue is being raised and the topic of the petition has an influence all over the globe, even individuals from other nations would have a right to demand them to act in the interest of not only their own electorate but also the individuals of the whole world. So, the elected representatives, although were elected by the locally registered voters, the elected representatives had responsibility towards the population of the whole world and not just for the locally registered voters.

The one word that was very regularly used by many interview participants to describe themselves or their connection to the issue in order to be able to demand such action from even elected representatives of other nations was "Global". They answered to the question using terms such as '*global citizen, citizen of the world, global community, global village, global issue, globally connected, etc*'. They felt that for any petition relating to the whole world, they had the right to demand such action; and the elected representatives at any and all levels all over the world have a responsibility to listen and act in the best interests of all the people of the world. The above "global" term was not limited to responses from one particular country or region, as some of the interview participants from all the four countries included in this research used the word to answer this question.

A very interesting response in a couple of cases of the participants signing petitions relating to local issues in other countries or regions was that they viewed any act supporting a local issue in any part of the world as an example that could very well be used as a precedent or juris prudence all over the world, i.e., an example of some action in some other part of the world that can be used as a showcase for demanding similar action in their own local or national

community. They were of the belief that although the topic of the petition was local and had absolutely no practical impact beyond a small geographical area such as a town or municipality, they felt that same issues or issues similar to the topic of the petition existed in their own town or municipality too and they supported the petition in those cases with the idea that if the petition succeeded in other geographical areas, then they could also achieve success on that topic in their own local geographical area.

Under present-day circumstances, leaders are not able to create a united front at the global level to handle the ever growing challenges which cannot be handled by any one country of the world on its own. In such a scenario, the emergence of new organizations which are started with a bottom up approach based on the idea of collecting the interests and opinions of individual persons all over the world on issues that are global, regional, national or even local, and directing such mass opinion towards the specific elected authority that has the responsibility to act upon the particular issue about which the opinions are collected, is a very interesting development which has to be thoroughly understood.

It becomes even necessary for studying them not only because of the increasing number of individuals from all corners of the globe who are supporting such organizations in any manner that is at their disposal, but also the increasing number of campaigns by such organizations which are being highlighted as successful in helping to find solutions to the issues that are being raised. This is especially important because even though it is not easy to find the effectiveness of these organizations in finding solutions for the issues they raise, or to measure their direct contribution or impact on the final outcome of the solution

for the issue that is raised, these organizations are increasingly gathering new supporters from all corners of the world.

This research makes a start by introducing the issue and problematizing it in this specific context. It attacks the general assumption that a global action in support of local issues done through most of these new organizations is based on solidarity. Using a qualitative empirical research, it presents a different perspective focused on the right to demand action based on an identification of global citizenship or community that most of the participants of these new organizations hold and base their actions upon.

This new perspective allows us to imagine a new structure that might make it possible to solve the contemporary issues which need a global response. It brings into discussion not the traditionally understood concept of a global citizenship, but a new kind of global citizenship that is based on the self-belief of the individual persons all over the world to have the right to demand action from elected representatives of not only their political unit but also from any national, regional or local geographical and political jurisdictions as well.

It is about their connection with not only the other humans of the world but also all natural things on earth. A belief that all those things within nature such as even forests, rivers or mountains are living beings and how humans treat them has an influence on the wellbeing of the whole planet, including the humans. Based on this kind of rights perspective of the individuals participating in the online petitions from any part of the world, an argument can definitely be raised that these online petitioning platforms are reducing the sovereign authority of

institutions such as nation states and their leaders, forcing them to act in line with the beliefs of the individuals from all over the world signing online petitions targeting them, and not just in the interests of a part or whole of their own electorate to whom they are constitutionally accountable.

These findings, raise important criticism of all those who claim that online political activism is not really useful in influencing the political representation and political consciousness of the individual members of the society. Those who claim that aspects relating to online political activism such as digital divide, clicktivism/slacktivism, and simplification are not really useful, seem to be basing their argument on fundamentally unstable ideas. Their perspectives are limited and narrow in their approach. The findings of this research present evidence of a different perspective that places online political activism in a positive light, and confirms that it has tremendous potential for the future of our society, which is increasing its dependence on online tools for almost all aspects of our society.

The specific new perspective provided on the aspect relating to the influence of internet on sovereignty aspect, presents an opportunity to look at online political activism as a source or origin for the much-needed ideas that could help our society to manage the increasingly global issues which need global solutions. This becomes even more important in light of our existing governance structures which have mainly been focused on a top down approach on this aspect, and failed miserably till now to come up with any successful solutions which gave any hope of the ability of the existing governance structures to manage increasingly global issues and problems.

For anyone who is interested in finding solutions to the global issues of the present day, the findings of this research will be immensely attractive, whether they be academics, students, politicians, civil servants, non-profit organizations, or just ordinary citizens who are socially conscious. Just about anyone who is thinking about any political or social issues and/or searching a way ahead for finding solutions to those issues will be able to find a guiding direction of thought that could lead towards a way forward on the right path in the findings of this research. In the present atmosphere of our society where intrusion of digital tools into every aspect of its individual members has become a major topic of societal attention and concern, this research presents a positive aspect of those same digital tools which present the individual members also the ideas to use the same digital tools to control them by creating and/or supporting public policies which could help the individual members to manage their lives in a better manner. It presents a perspective which allows individual members of the society more power and influence on how their elected representatives deal with the possible solutions to the major issues of the society.

In our present society, where inequality has reached alarming levels and still continues to increase, and where an increasing number of individuals all across the world believe that their elected representatives are not acting in the best interests of the society, this research presents a perspective which allows them to discover new innovative idea, methods, and tools, which are being created and supported by similar ordinary individuals across the world who have already taken a step towards improving the unacceptable existing situation.

Whether the individual is a citizen of one of the richest countries of the world who is complaining about the flight of his employment opportunity to the

developing world leaving him bankrupt and homeless, or an indigenous person living in a poor African country or the Amazon jungles, the findings of this research could be equally useful to both of them to find a tool that could help them towards improving their situation. Whether its a politician unable to understand how to deal with an increasing number of non-constituents who are demanding him to act in a certain way, or a socially conscious citizen who is finding it hard to find solutions to global warming or climate change, both of them will also find the findings of this research useful to understand the perspective which could lead towards a helping hand in understanding and dealing with their situation.

As the introduction chapter presented, this research is based on two main factors which helped shape this research. The urgent necessity of the individual's critical questioning and understanding abilities is the first main factor which helped shape this research, and ideas such as Karl Polyani's 'Double Movement' is the second. This research started with an idea to explore the innovative methods and tools facilitated by digital media to examine how digital technologies are helping in the development process of organic intellectuals? It started with the hypothesis that multiple stakeholders are using digital media to enhance democratic political participation and the ability of citizens to make better political decisions. The three main stakeholders recognized were the initiators of such digital media based tools and processes, citizens who use those tools and processes, and elected representatives who are the targets of the above two stakeholders.

The main focus was supposed to be on the factors that directed the attention of the initiators towards these processes and how they promoted them, what were the factors that encouraged the citizens to accept these processes, and how was

it influencing the political participation processes and the three stakeholders. If possible, to also go beyond this to explore the intended and un-intended consequences of these processes. Realizing the enormity of these explorations and the time frame of a PhD, it was decided to select one specific part relating to the citizen's participation in these processes for this PhD dissertation, as the first step of the overall research plan. Now that the first step has been attempted, the natural continuation of this research would be to take up the other two major parts presented above.

The arguments presented and tested in this research would be especially interesting to the followers of Antonio Gramsci's ideas utilized in a digital setting. The new perspective relating to the aspect of a rights-based approach towards elected representatives of the existing governance systems all over the world, and its influence on the sovereignty of countries as presented in this research would be interesting to any conscious individual of our present times. The research especially opens a new window for any academic scholar or student interested in exploring the above presented perspective about sovereignty, which has presented a new idea of political participation at a global level hitherto been understood only as an action based on solidarity. The scholar conducting this research has himself faced a similar academic wall, and his attempts to break the wall have allowed him to make a small hole which he hopes other similarly minded scholars will help to make bigger in order to turn the hole into a path.

In the process of doing this research, the author has also faced challenges and realized the many limitations that impose themselves on the research results. Unlike the research in physical sciences, social sciences research throws many hurdles which some academics from other fields may consider as making

impossible to present any kind of scientific findings. The author has himself thought if he would be able to find the exact similar results if he undertook the same study again or after few years. The result has been a realization that, if not the exact results, the result will most probably be very similar to the opinions expressed by the interview participants if the study was conducted again. If the situation does not improve much in few years and the inequality keeps on increasing without any sights of decreasing, then the results of the same study will present a similar set of findings as presented in this research. In that case, the chances are that the findings of this research will be corroborated with a much higher levels of interest and action presented by the interview participants. The author also sincerely hopes that the situation will be a lot better in the future and hopes to find a much more positive disposition of the state of affairs compared to the present.

Bibliography

Abramson, P. & Inglehart, R. (1995). Value Change in Global Perspective. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. DOI: 10.3998/mpub.23627

Avaaz. (2018). The World in Action (n.d.).

Retrieved from <https://avaaz.org/page/en/about/> Accessed 12 September 2017

Bailey, R. (1976). The Right of Petition in Eighteenth Century Virginia. Ann Arbor,

Michigan, USA & London, England: University Microfilms International.

Bang, H. P. (2005). Among everyday makers and expert citizens. In J. Newman (Ed.), Remaking

governance: Peoples, politics and the public sphere (pp. 159–178). Bristol, UK: The Policy Press

Bang, H. P. (2010). Everyday makers and expert citizens: Active participants in search for a new

governance. In J. Fenwick, & J. McMillan (Eds.), Public management in the postmodern Era:

Challenges and prospects (pp. 163–192). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Benford, R., and Snow, D. (2004) “Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment.” Annual Review of Sociology, no.26 (2000): 611–639

Bennett, W. & Segerberg, A. (2012). The Logic of Connetice Action: The Personalization of Contentious Politics, Information, Communication & Society, 15(5), pp. 739-768.

Biswas, S. (2010). W(h)ither the Nation State? National and State Identity in the Face of Fragmentation and Globalization, Global Society, 16:2, 175-198.

Blühdrön, I. (2009). Democracy beyond the Modernist Subject: Complexity and the Late-modern Reconfiguration of Legitimacy, In, In Search of Legitimacy. Policy Making in Europe and the Challenge of Societal

Complexity. Barbara Budrich.

Brinkman, L. & Brinkman, E. (2008) Globalization

and the Nation-State: Dead or Alive, *Journal of Economic Issues*, 42:2, 425-433, DOI:

10.1080/00213624.2008.11507151

Bruno, K., Büchi, R. & Braun, N. (2010). *Guidebook to Democracy in Switzerland and Beyond*. IRI Europe.

Budge, I. (1996). *The New Challenge of Direct Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Carpentier, N. (2011). *Media and participation. A site of ideological-democratic struggle*. Bristol: Intellect.

Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers.

Castells, M. (1997). *The power of identity*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell.

Castells, M. (1998). *End of millennium*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Castells, M. (2005). *Global Governance and Global Politics*. *Political Science and*

Politics, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Jan., 2005), pp. 9-16

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication power*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. (2011). *Communication power*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Change.org. (2017). The world's platform for change. (n.d.). <https://www.change.org/>. Accessed 12 September 2017

Christensen, H. (2012). Simply slacktivism? Internet participation in Finland. *JeDEM* 4(1): 1-23, 2012 ISSN 2075-9517, <http://www.jedem.org>

Clark, S. L. (2009) *Digital Media and the Generation Gap*, Information,

Communication & Society, 12:3, 388-407, DOI: [10.1080/13691180902823845](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180902823845)

Clarke, H., Sanders, D., Stewart, M. & Whiteley, P. (2004). *Political Choice in Britain*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Coleman, S., & Blumer, J. G. (2009). *The internet and democratic citizenship. Theory, practice and policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crehan, K. (2016). *Gramsci's Common Sense: Inequality and its narratives*. Duke University Press. Durham and London.

Dahl, R. A. (1971). *Polyarchy; participation and opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dahl, R. (1998). *On democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dasgupta, R. (2018). The demise of the nation state. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/apr/05/demise-of-the-nation-state-rana-dasgupta>

Della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (1999). *Social movements: an introduction*. Oxford ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell.

Della Porta, D. and Parks, L. (2014) *Framing processes in the climate movement: from climate change to climate justice*. In: Routledge handbook of climate change movements. Routledge.

Dijk, J. van. (1999). *The network society: social aspects of new media*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications.

Dijk J. van. (2006). Digital divide research, achievements and shortcomings. *Poetics* 34, pp 221-235.

Dijk, J. van. (2012). *The network society* (3rd edition.). London: Sage Publications.

Ellison, N., & Hardey, M. (2013). Developing Political Conversations? *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(6), 878–898. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2012.740495

Entman, R. (1993). *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*.

Journal of Communication 43(4), Autumn.

Femia, J. (1975). Hegemony and Consciousness in the thought of Antonio Gramsci. *Political Studies*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1(29-48)

Femia, J. (1979). The Gramsci Phenomenon : Some Reflections, *Political Studies*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (472-483)

Femia, J. (1989). Gramsci : Marxism's Saviour or False Prophet? *Political Studies*, Vol. XXXVII, 282-289

Feld, L. & Kirchgässner, G. (2000). Direct democracy, political culture, and the outcome of economic policy: a report on the Swiss experience. *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, 287-306.

Frogacs, D. (2000). *The Antonio Gramsci Reader : Selected Writings 1916-1935*, New York University Press.

Froomkin, A. M. (2004). "Technologies for Democracy." In *Democracy Online: The Prospects for Democratic Renewal Through the Internet*, edited by P. Shane. London: Routledge.

Garnham, N. (1997) 'Amartya Sen's "Capabilities" Approach to the Evaluation of

Welfare: its Application to Communication', *Javnost-The Public* 4(4): 25–34.

Geron, Tomio. (2012). "The Business Behind Change.Org's Activist Petitions."

Forbes. Accessed September 12, 2017.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tomiogeron/2012/10/17/activism-for-profit-change-org-makes-an-impact-and-makes-money/>.

Giddens, A. (2005). Giddens and the 'G'-word: An interview with Anthony Giddens *Global Media and Communication* April 2005 1: 63-77.

Gill, S. (2002). *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*, Palgrave Macmillan, UK.

Gladwell, M. (2010). Small Change – Why the Revolution will not be Tweeted. *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010.

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell?
currentPage=all#ixzz10raPq1SX](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell?currentPage=all#ixzz10raPq1SX)

Gould, C. (2009). Structuring Global Democracy: Political Communities, Universal Human Rights, and Transnational Representation. *Metaphilosophy* Vol. 40, No. 1, SPECIAL ISSUE: GLOBAL DEMOCRACY AND EXCLUSION, pp. 24-41

Görg, C. & Hirsch, J. (2011) Is international democracy possible?, Review of International Political Economy, 5:4, 585-615, DOI: [10.1080/096922998347390](https://doi.org/10.1080/096922998347390)

Habermas, J. (1991). The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, Thomas Burger, Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Halupka, M. (2014). "Clicktivism: A Systematic Heuristic." *Policy & Internet* 6 (2): 115–132.

Halupka, M. (2016). The rise of information activism: how to bridge dualisms and reconceptualise political participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, Vol. 19, No.10,1487-1503

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1119872>

Halupka, M. (2018). The legitimisation of clicktivism. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 130-141.

Hansard (1997) Parliamentary Debates, Friday 11 July. London: Her Majesty's StationaryOffice.

Held, D. (2006). Reframing Global Governance: Apocalypse Soon or Reform!. New

Political Economy, Vol. 11, No. 2.

Hertog, J.K. and McLeod, D. (2008) "A Multiperspectival approach to framing analysis: A field guide." In *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and our Understanding of the Social World*, edited by S.D. Reese, O.H. Gandy, Jr., and

- A.E. Grant. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008.
- Hindman, M. (2009). *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Hirst, P. & Thompson, G. (2006) Globalization and the future of the nation state, *Economy and Society*, 24:3, 408-442, DOI: [10.1080/03085149500000017](https://doi.org/10.1080/03085149500000017)
- Hoare and Nowell. (1971). 'Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci', International Publishers.
- Inglehart, R. (1977). *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*. Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1990a). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (1990b). *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UnivPress.
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R. (2015). *The silent revolution: changing values and political styles among Western publics*.
- Jung, J., J. Qiu and Y. Kim (2001) 'Internet Connectedness and Inequality: Beyond the Divide', *Communication Research* 28(4): 507–35.
- Jungherr, A. & Jurgens, P. (2010). The Political Click: Political Participation through E-Petitions in Germany. *Policy & Internet*, Vol. 2: Iss. 4, Article 6
- Karpf, D. (2010). "Online Political Mobilization From the Advocacy Group's Perspective: Looking Beyond Clicktivism." *Policy & Internet* 2 (4): 7–41.
- Katz, J. Rice, R. Aspden, P. (2001). The Internet, 1995-2000: Access, Civic Involvement, and Social Interaction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 405-419
- Kingsley, Patrick. (2011). Avaaz: activism or "slacktivism"? | World news | The

Guardian. (n.d.). July 20, 2011.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/20/avaaz-activism-slactivism-clicktivism>. Accessed 12 September 2017

Kiros, T. (1985). Towards the construction of a theory of political action: Antonio Gramsci, University Press of America.

Kitzinger, J.(2007). "Framing and frame analysis." In Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates, edited by E. Devereux. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007.

Lacher, H. (2008). The politics of the market: Re-reading Karl Polanyi, Global Society, 13:3, 313-326, DOI: [10.1080/13600829908443193](https://doi.org/10.1080/13600829908443193)

Laclau and Mouffe. (2001). Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics. Verso. London and NY.

Levien, M. & Paret, M. (2012). A second double movement? Polanyi and shifting global opinions on neoliberalism, International Sociology, Volume: 27 issue: 6, page(s): 724-744, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580912444891>

Lupia & Matsusaka. (2004). Direct Democracy: New Approaches to Old Questions. Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2004. 7:463-82

Mann, M. (2011) Has globalization ended the rise and rise of the nation-state?, Review of International Political Economy, 4:3, 472-496, DOI: [10.1080/096922997347715](https://doi.org/10.1080/096922997347715)

Matsusaka, John G. (2005a), 'The eclipse of legislatures: *direct democracy* in the 21st century. *Public Choice*, 124, 157-77.

Matsusaka John G. (2005b), '*Direct democracy works*', Journal of Economic Perspectives, 19, 185-206.

Matsusaka, John G. (2006), '*Direct democracy* and electoral reform', in Michael P. McDonald and John Samples (eds), The Marketplace of Democracy: Electoral Competition and American Politics. Washington DC:Brookings Institution Press. pp.151-70.

- Matsusaka, G. (2017). Public Policy and the Initiative and Referendum : A Survey with Some New Evidence. New Working Paper Series No. 8, Stigler Center for the Study of the Economy and the State, University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Mazak, J. & Stetka, V. (2016). Who's afraid of clicktivism? Exploring citizens' use of social media and political participation in the Czech Republic. In: Frame, A. & Brachotte, G. (eds.) Citizen Participation and Political Communication in a Digital World. New York: Routledge, pp. 125-138
- McAdam, D. (1982). Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Miller, L. (2008). e-Petitions at Westminster: the Way Forward for Democracy? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62(1), 162–177. doi:10.1093/pa/gsn044
- Morozov, E. (2009). “The Brave New World of Slacktivism.” Foreign Policy, from <http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the-brave-new-world-of-slacktivism/>
- Moscato, D. (2016). Media Portrayals of Hastag Activism: A Framing Analysis of Canada's #idlenomore Movement. *Media and Communication* 2016, Volume 4, Issue 2, Pages 3-12
- Moussa, M. (2013). Online Mobilization in Times of Conflict: A Framing-Analysis Perspective. *Arab Media & Society*, Issue 17, Winter 2013
- Murphy, C. (2000). Global Governance: Poorly Done and Poorly Understood. *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 1944-), Vol. 76, No. 4. pp. 789-803.
- Müller-Rommel, F. (Ed.). (1989). *New politics in Western Europe: the rise and success of green parties and alternative lists*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Noakes, J. and Johnston, H. (2005). “Frames of protest: A road map to a perspective.” In *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, edited by H. Johnston and J.A. Noakes. Lanham, MD: Rowman &

Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005

Pariser, E. (2010). *The filter bubble. What the internet is hiding from you.* New York: Penguin.

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patomäki, H. (2014). On the Dialectics of Global Governance in the Twenty-first Century: A Polanyian Double Movement?, *Globalizations*, 11:5, 733-750, DOI: [10.1080/14747731.2014.981079](https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2014.981079)

Piketty, T. 2013. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century.* Harvard University Press. Poguntke, T. (1993). *Alternative politics: the German Green Party.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation.* Boston: Beacon. http://inctpped.ie.ufrj.br/spiderweb/pdf_4/Great_Transformation.pdf

Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon & Schuster

Quan-Haase, A., Martin, K., & Schreurs, K. (2016) Interviews with digital seniors: ICT use in the context of everyday life, *Information, Communication & Society*, 19:5, 691-707, DOI: [10.1080/1369118X.2016.1140217](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1140217)

Riley, S., More, Y., Griffin, C. (2010). The Case for 'Everyday Politics': Evaluating Neo-tribal Theory as a Way to Understand Alternative Forms of Political Participation, Using Electronic Dance Music Culture as an Example. *Sociology*, Vol. 44(2): 345-363

Robinson, A. (2005). Towards an Intellectual Reformation: The Critique of Common Sense and the Forgotten Revolutionary Project of Gramscian Theory, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 8:4, 469-481, DOI: [10.1080/13698230500205045](https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230500205045).

Robinson, W. (2005). Gramsci and globalization: From Nation-State to Transnational Hegemony, *Critical Review of International Social and*

Political Philosophy, 8:4,559-574, DOI: 10.1080/13698230500205243

Romer T, Rosenthal H. (1979). Bureaucrats ver-sus voters: on the political economy of re-source allocation by direct democracy. Q. J. Econ. 93:563–87

Russell J. Dalton. (1994). *The Green rainbow: environmental groups in Western Europe* / Russell J. Dalton. New Haven [u.a.]: Yale UnivPress.

Rupert, M. (2005). Reading Gramsci in an Era of Globalising Capitalism, Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 8:4, 483-497, DOI:10.1080/13698230500205060

Sassen, S. (2002). Towards a Sociology of Information Technology. Current Sociology.

Shaw, M. (2011) The state of globalization: towards a theory of state transformation, Review of International Political Economy, 4:3, 497-513, DOI: [10.1080/096922997347724](https://doi.org/10.1080/096922997347724)

Shulman, S. (2009). The case against mass E-mails: Perverse incentives and low quality public par-ticipation in US federal rulemaking. Policy & Internet, 1(1), 23–53. doi:10.2202/1944-2866.1010

Sommier, C. (2011). The role of the right to petition the European Parliament. Unpublished master's thesis, Otto Suhr Institute, Free University, Berlin.

Sriprasit, S. (2014). The Mobilization Effects of Online Campaigns: An Experimental Study of Online Environmental Petitions. Master's Thesis, University of Amsterdam.

Steel, B. S., Warner, R. L., Stieber, B., & Lovrich, N. P. (1992). Postmaterialist Values and Support for Feminism Among Canadian and American Women and Men. *Political Research Quarterly*, 45(2), 339–353. doi:10.1177/106591299204500204

Stiglitz, J. (2002). globalization and its discontents. USA:W W Norton and company.

Sunstein, C. (2001). Republic.com. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Thomas, R. (1996) 'Access and Inequality', in N. Heap, R. Thomas, G. Einon, R.
- Mason and H. Mackay (eds) *Information Technology and Society*, pp. 90–100. London: Sage
- Tolbert, C. (1998). "*Direct Democracy and Governance Policies.*" In *Citizens as Legislators*, edited by Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Caroline Tolbert. Ohio State University Press. 2003
- Verba, S. & Nie, N.H. (1972). *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. New York: Harper Row.
- Voss, L. H. van. (2002). *Petitions in Social History*. Cambridge University Press.
- White, M. (2010). "Clicktivism is Ruining Leftist Activism." *The Guardian*, from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/aug/12/clicktivism-ruining-leftist-activism>
- Wills, M. (1999) 'Bridging the digital divide', *Adults Learning*, 11(4): 10–11
- Williams, R.H. (2004). "The cultural contexts of collective action: Constraints, opportunities, and the symbolic life of social movements." In *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, edited by D.A. Snow, S.A. Soule and H. Kriesi, 91–115. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004
- Wresch, W. (1996) *Disconnected: Haves and Have-nots in the Information Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Pres.
- Wright, S. (2012). Politics as usual? Revolution, normalization and a new agenda for online deliberation. *New Media and Society*, 14(2), 244–261
- Wright, S. (2012). Assessing (e-)Democratic Innovations: "Democratic Goods" and Downing Street E-Petitions. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 9(4), 453–470. doi:10.1080/19331681.2012.712820
- Wright, S. (2015). Populism and Downing Street e-petitions: Connective

action, hybridity and the changing nature of organizing. *Political Communication*, 32(3): 414–433

Wright, S. (2016) ‘Success’ and online political participation: The case of Downing Street E-petitions, *Information, Communication & Society*, 19:6, 843-857, DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2015.1080285

Worth, O. (2013). Polanyi's *Magnum Opus*? Assessing the Application of the Counter-Movement in International Political Economy, *The International History Review*, 35:4, 905-920, DOI: [10.1080/07075332.2013.817464](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2013.817464)

Zurn, M. (2003). Global Governance in der Legitimationskrise?, In: Claus Offe (ed.), *Demokratisierung der Demokratie. Diagnosen und Reformvorschläge*, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus,, 232-256 (revised version of 119)

Appendix

Interview Questionnaire:

The word Avaaz was used in the initial questionnaire in Brazil. In USA, India and Germany, this was changed to include Change.org or any other online petitioning platform to improve the chances of finding interview participants.

The questionnaire was a guidance tool which was adjusted according to the situation during the fieldwork.

Personal Details:

1. Could you please share your name and age?
2. Since how long do you live in your current city, (name of the city)? Where did you live before here and for how long?
3. What is your educational background? / what is your highest educational qualification?
4. What do you do for a living? / What is your source of livelihood? / What is your profession/Trade?
5. How many non-work hours do you spend online per day/week?

Avaaz Knowledge:

1. Since how many weeks/months/years do you know Avaaz?
2. How did you come to know about Avaaz?
3. Did you sign any petitions of Avaaz?
If yes, (follow on question) approximately how many? 5/10/15/20/25...?
4. What was the reason behind signing the petitions?
5. Do you sign all the petitions that you see from Avaaz or choose to sign some and ignore some?

If yes, (follow on question) what is the basis of deciding which one to choose and which one

to ignore?

6. Did you sign any petition relating to any country other than Brazil?

For yes or no,(follow on question) Why?

7. If yes, for above Q6., (follow on question) do you give more importance to petitions from Brazil/South America compared to petitions relating to other countries/regions?

8. Do you spend any time understanding the issue before you sign a petition?

If yes, (follow on question) how much?

9. Do you also do some personal research about the issue before signing a petition other than the information given by Avaaz?

If yes, (follow on question) what kind of research? And where do you look for more information?

10. Do you discuss the petitions you signed with any of your contacts like friends, family, co-workers, etc?

11. After signing a petition, Avaaz asks you to share the petitions on Facebook, Twitter, and email. Do you share the petitions using these formats?

If yes, (follow on question) which ones?

12. Avaaz sometimes also asks for financial contribution and asks sometimes to participate in demonstrations and rallies. Did you support an Avaaz campaign in any of these kinds of methods other than signing the petition? If yes, (follow on question) which methods?

13. After some days of signing any petition, do you follow up for the results of the petitions you signed?

If yes, (follow on question) how?

14. Do you think the work of Avaaz is generally successful in finding solutions for the issues it highlights through Petitions?

If yes, (follow on question) how do you think that Avaaz is able to solve the issues raised?

15. Do you think that the work of Avaaz influences decision making by politicians and bureaucrats in the real world?

16. Among all the Avaaz petitions you have signed, or know of, which one is the most successful petition?

17. Avaaz collects signatures on petitions on various issues from different regions of the world. Do you have any thoughts about this? (If no answer, clarify with below question)

*Some of the Avaaz petitions are relating to a particular group of people or a national or local issue, and the petition is asking your support. Do you sign such petitions?

If yes, (follow on question) if someone says that the local minister/authority has no responsibility to answer to your demands as you are not that country citizen, and hence you have no right to demand any action from that country's elected representatives, what would be your response?

(This question could also be asked other way around, : other country nationals are signing petitions relating to your country/region. What do you think about this? – Which version is a better option for this questionnaire??)

If No, (follow on question) why not?

18. Avaaz petitions get signatures of people from more than 150 countries. Why do you think people from so many different countries and regions of the world sign the petitions which are not related to their local/national/regional issues?

19. Some people say that clicking a link on-line or sending an email does not do any good. In fact they claim that it reduces real world physical protest and demonstrations. What is your opinion about this?

20. Some people also say that most of the people who sign Avaaz petitions are people who have access to computers and Internet and hence are from well off parts of society and do not represent the wishes of all sections of the society. What do you think about this?

21. Some people say that Avaaz does not present all the complexities involved in an issue and tries to over simplify them to fit in one email. What do you think about this?

22. Do you think our society needs organizations like Avaaz?

If yes, (follow on question) then why?

(If no answer, clarify with below question)

* Do you think Avaaz is contributing to democracy or governance?

If yes, (follow on question) then how?

23. Do you feel satisfied with how Avaaz works or do you want to see any improvements in the working of Avaaz?

If yes, (follow on question) what would they be?

Connection with other NGOs:

1. Were you part of any NGOs or social movements or protests before signing your first Avaaz petition?

If yes, (follow on question) which NGOs or movements or protests and in what manner? I mean signing petitions or giving money or joining demonstrations, etc?

2. Did you start reading about or participating in any other form of political issues, or started doing it more actively, after starting to sign Avaaz petitions?

If yes, (follow on question) do you think signing Avaaz petitions increased your interest in social / political issues?

3. Do you think Avaaz is doing anything different from other NGOs like Greenpeace, Oxfam, or Transparency International, or do you think they are the same?

If different, (follow on question) then how?

4. If Avaaz did not exist, would you have been as active in social issues as you are now?

If no, (follow on question) why not?

If yes, (follow on question) how would you have been active? What would you be doing? Which organizations or teams would you have joined?